

SIMEON NORTH  
FIRST OFFICIAL PISTOL MAKER

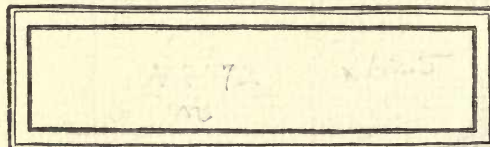
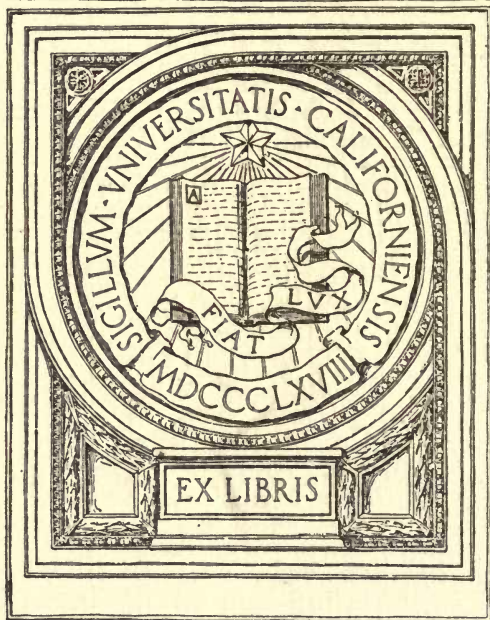
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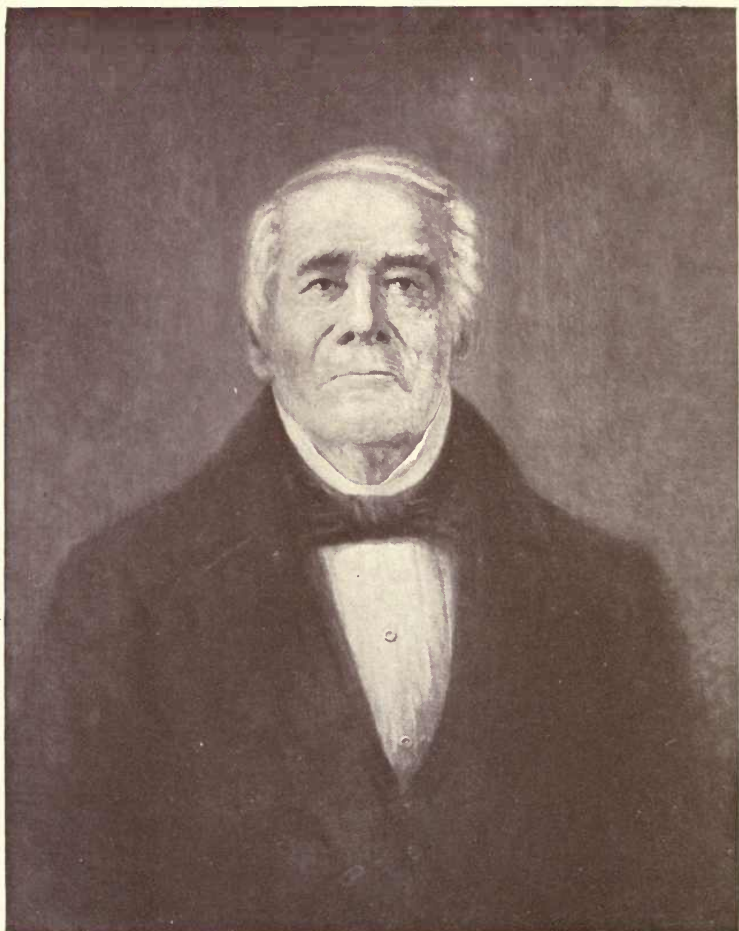












Simon North



# SIMEON NORTH

First Official Pistol Maker of the  
United States

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A MEMOIR

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By  
S. N. D. NORTH, LL.D.  
and  
RALPH H. NORTH

UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

CONCORD, N. H.  
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AND  
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WASHINGTON, D. C.

TO VIND  
ABROGATED



# SIMEON NORTH

FIRST OFFICIAL PISTOL MAKER OF THE UNITED STATES

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A MEMOIR

DEDICATED TO THEIR WIVES  
BY THE AUTHORS



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## FOREWORD

This Memoir is the outcome of a thorough search in the archives of the War and Navy Departments of the United States Government at Washington, and elsewhere, made by its authors, who are great-grandsons of Simeon North.

Becoming interested in the achievements of their ancestor in the manufacture of pistols and guns for government use, they were surprised to find that there nowhere existed, in any public form, any record of these achievements, nor any knowledge of them on the part of the historians of the subject.

The career of Colonel North in this capacity covered a period extending over more than half a century, and was characterized by a progressive advance in the character and quality of the arms manufactured so notable and exceptional, that they were led to think there must be a documentary history behind this service, which it was worth while to unearth, if possible. With this end in view, many visits were made to Washington, in search of the official records of Colonel

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North's relations with the United States Government. In the beginning the work was slow and discouraging, but as time passed, several gentlemen officially connected with the War and Navy Departments became interested in the search, and through their courteous and cordial coöperation, access was afforded to records and memoranda, some of which had not been looked at for a century or more, and among which, by dint of examining every paper and entry in turn, many contracts between the War and Navy Departments and Simeon North, and a large part of the correspondence connected with them, were found and copied.

The authors desire to express their grateful appreciation of the kindly interest and valuable assistance rendered them by General William Crozier, General Alfred Mordecai, Colonel John T. Thompson, Mr. John J. Cook, Mr. E. A. Gongwer, Mr. S. E. Faunce, Mr. Edward S. Brandt, Mr. Charles W. Stewart, and other officials in these departments.

They also desire to acknowledge the sympathetic aid and encouragement received from Mr. George C. Maynard, of the National Museum, who is rendering a real service to history and his country, by his careful study into the



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early history of the arms manufacture in the United States, and by his efforts to secure a complete collection of types of these arms.

Early in their search, it became evident that the records of the government were not kept with the care and system, in the early days, which are now applied in all the departments at Washington. It became evident also that there are gaps and important lapses in these records, very largely due, no doubt, to the several fires that have occurred in government buildings. Many of these priceless records have never been classified and assorted, and are in large part inaccessible to students and investigators.

It is a disgrace to our nation that we have not at the Capital a splendid Hall of Records, in which all these archives can be safely stored, properly arranged by scientific custodians, catalogued and indexed for convenient reference, and made accessible, under proper safeguards, to those who would welcome the opportunity to work in such an inexhaustible mine of history. Not until this building is constructed and these archives are installed, can thousands of facts in our country's history, now matters of tradition or conjecture, be run down, verified and brought to the knowledge of the world.

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In the meanwhile it is our good fortune, as a result of our researches, to be able to present in these pages some new and important facts regarding the early history of the manufacture of small arms in the United States, and to correct some erroneous statements which have crept into so-called history, because writers on this subject have not taken the pains to search the original records, before jumping at conclusions. So that this volume incidentally serves another useful purpose, besides the one which led to its undertaking.

WASHINGTON, D. C.  
PHILADELPHIA, PA.



## CHAPTER I

### THE PIONEER MANUFACTURERS OF NEW ENGLAND— SOME HISTORICAL REMINISCENCES

**T**HESE pages gather together the fragmentary materials which permit a record of the services rendered to his country by Colonel Simeon North, of Connecticut, the first official pistol maker of the United States, and so far as known, the only private citizen who held that relationship with the government during the first fifty years of its existence.

The name of Simeon North is unknown except to his descendants, to a few army and navy officials, and to antiquarians who interest themselves in the history of the development and manufacture of firearms in the United States. When one of these collectors discovers a flint-lock pistol bearing upon its side the legend "S. North, Berlin (or Middletown), Conn." he knows that he has a prize, just as surely as the numismatist knows a rare coin. He can trace, in his collection of these old relics, the several steps by which this small arm was gradually improved and perfected, until it became that

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most perfect instrument of defense and attack, the automatic magazine pistol of today.

The few writers who have attempted to record the historical and technical development of the manufacture of firearms in the United States, have either overlooked Simeon North, or passed him over with a mere mention. J. Leander Bishop, who published three big volumes on the *History of American Manufactures from 1608 to 1860*, apparently never heard of Simeon North, although he mentions many men who made a few muskets or pistols for private sale. Several explanations for this oversight suggest themselves. Although Simeon North and his assistants invented many tools and machines for the manufacture of arms, applicable in other industries, he never sought any personal renown or profit from their use, other than that derived from their application in his own factory. It is in the records of the Patent Office chiefly that the historians have searched for the names of early manufacturers to exploit. The manufacture of muskets and rifles was of much greater importance and magnitude than that of pistols, in which Colonel North was exclusively engaged during the first half of his manufacturing experience. Owing to his long career as an arms manu-



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facturer, extending over more than half a century, from 1799 to 1852, his early achievements were lost sight of and forgotten with the closing of his business. At the time of his death, of the four sons who had been associated with him, two were dead, a third was an invalid and died shortly after his father, while the surviving son, who succeeded to the business, was probably too fully engrossed with his own affairs to devote any time to preparing any record of the work done by his father in the development of the industry. For twenty years prior to his death, Colonel North was engaged exclusively in the manufacture of the Hall gun, which he improved in many of its details. With the completion of his last contract, one year subsequent to his death, the manufacture of the Hall gun ceased, and the North factory went out of business shortly afterwards. Meanwhile, other factories were established, the old models disappeared, and their makers were forgotten.

It will serve a good purpose if this Memoir can reproduce in some degree the man behind the name of Simeon North. We shall find in him another splendid type of the New England citizen, as he was at the beginning of the last century. The more such men we can rescue from

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the oblivion of their eventful though unrecorded lives, the better for our own times and for our country. The more examples of the simple life of that period, pursued quietly, earnestly, unselfishly, the more such lives we are likely to have in the future.

Two characteristics of Simeon North will especially emphasize themselves, as his simple tale unfolds. One was the characteristic of self-effacement,—his readiness to permit others to profit by whatever improvements and inventions he was able to make in the art of which he was the master. The other was the steady purpose to accomplish whatever he set out to do, no matter what obstacles and discouragements he might encounter. Judged by certain modern standards, his life was a failure; for he left no fortune, although he could easily have done so had his standard of personal honor been less rigid. Judged from every other point of view, here was a life that may well serve as a lesson and an example. It was a life dedicated to the making and improvement of a particular article of which his country stood greatly in need.

Simeon North was one of a long line of men whose rewards were scant and uncertain. Those pioneer American manufacturers, in whatever



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field they labored, were as a rule patriotic citizens, with whom the welfare of the nation, the state and the home community, was always a first consideration. They were men generous with the increment of their labor in times of prosperity, and capable of bearing losses without complaint or discouragement, when misfortune came. Many establishments went down in the stress of those early days; more fortunes were lost than gained. We can see in retrospect the slow upgrowing of these first factories over the eastern and middle states. A drive along the banks of any one of their streams will bring us to one after another of the sites of these primitive establishments, often now but blackened or decayed ruins, or with every sign of their busy activity obliterated. They are eloquent with the story of the building of the nation. They recall the courage and determination of those pioneer manufacturers; the trials and tribulations they endured with their clumsy machinery,—machinery that often would not go, or went all wrong; the vexation and loss from low water, when there was no steam to take its place; the anguish of slow markets and bad debts. The wheels of the old mills are silent now, not because their owners lacked industry

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or ability, but because the advance in the art of manufacture was through troublesome times, often of paralysis and panic, when credit was hard to get, when skilled workmen could not be found, and when competition was as cruel as it is today. All honor to the pioneer manufacturer, whether he succeeded or failed; scant credit has he had for his share in our material development.

We have had in the United States very few instances of the uninterrupted descent of a manufacturing business from father to son, through successive generations. Our families tend to scatter, and the conditions of business shift so rapidly, that families are displaced or dispossessed with startling frequency.

Here and there was an early manufacturer who prospered, greatly perhaps, not always through any superior energy or skill, but in accordance with the trick Dame Fortune has of skipping about capriciously in the bestowal of her favors; and their descendants preserve the splendid establishments that grew from such humble beginnings. But the roll of the successful is short indeed, by the side of those who put their lives, their earnings and their hopes into enterprises for which the country was not ready



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or the conditions not favorable, and who through failure paved the way for those who came after them.

It is not our purpose to put Simeon North on any pinnacle; there were many like him. But we hope to add another name to the list of those to whom the new generations can look for an example and an inspiration. Nor is there any purpose to detract from the honor which belongs to other pioneers in the field where Simeon North was preëminent. Let all honor be done to all of them!

Colonel North was one of a type so indigenous and exceptional, that an English traveler who visited the United States many years ago described him as the "Connecticut man," and nicknamed the little state in which he found him "Clockland,"—not merely because the modern clock was first devised and perfected in Connecticut, but because innumerable other devices, tools and machines had their origin there, with a degree of diversity elsewhere unknown. Mr. Pidgeon's description of the "Connecticut man" is very pertinent to the purposes of this Memoir. "Usually tall, thin, reflective, and taciturn," he writes, "but clever, and above all things, free, the equal, although a

mechanic, of the capitalist upon whose ready alliance he counts, he is an element of incalculable value to American industry. His method of attacking manufacturing problems is one which, intelligently handled, must command markets by simultaneously improving qualities and cheapening prices. We Englishmen certainly aim, as they do in New England, at the specialization of manufacture; but one scarcely treads upon the threshold of 'Clockland,' before feeling how much more universally the system is being applied in the United States. Tools and processes which we are inclined to consider exceptionally clever, are the commonplaces of American shops, and the determination to do nothing by hand which can be done by a machine is the chief characteristic. The 'Connecticut man' is an element of the utmost importance in the industrial development of America, a force for which we unfortunately have no equivalent in England."\*

The history of the manufacture of firearms in the United States has been imperfectly written.† This little volume will add some impor-

\**Old World Questions and New World Answers*, by Daniel Pidgeon, F. G. S. New York, 1885.

†The two principal publications on the subject are: *Firearms in Ameri-*



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tant details which have not heretofore been published. Few of the names of those who founded the industry in this country are known. Most conspicuous among them has been that of Eli Whitney of New Haven, Connecticut, the inventor of the cotton gin, remembered not so much for what he did to develop the arms industry, as because of his unique service to America's greatest agricultural product. His biographers have preserved some interesting facts regarding his experiences and services in the arms manufacture; and it will be seen that there existed a remarkable similarity to those of Simeon North. They were born in the same year; they were for the most of their lives near neighbors in Connecticut, as neighbors were in those days; they were both born with a genius for mechanical invention, and they both turned their attention simultaneously to the same field, the manufacture of arms for the United States Government. Both contributed in a notable degree to the invention and development of machines that enabled this country to compete successfully

*can History*; Vol. I, 1600 to 1800; *The Revolver*; Vol. II. By Charles Winthrop Sawyer. Boston, 1911.

*American Inventions and Improvements in Breechloading Small Arms, Heavy Ordnance, etc.* By Brevet Brigadier General Charles B. Norton. Boston, 1882.

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with the arms makers of Great Britain and France. Until they embarked in the business, the industry may be said to have been non-existent, except as a blacksmith's trade. The country had not yet found its way out of the backward state of the mechanical arts so sedulously and successfully perpetuated by the colonial policy of the mother country. Singularly enough, each secured his first contract with the government within fourteen months of the other, Eli Whitney for muskets, on January 14, 1798, and Simeon North for pistols, on March 9, 1799. There is no evidence that they were personally acquainted; but it does not seem possible in the circumstances, that either could have lacked some knowledge of what the other was doing.

Discouraged by the difficulties which everywhere attended his first efforts to introduce the cotton gin in the South, Mr. Whitney addressed a letter to his friend and neighbor, Oliver Wolcott, of Connecticut, then the Secretary of the Treasury, and through his influence secured a contract to supply the government with 10,000 muskets, within two years. The government advanced \$5,000 to enable Mr. Whitney to build his works; and with the aid of several



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friends he obtained a loan of \$10,000 more.\* The expenditure and time involved in the work so greatly exceeded Mr. Whitney's expectations, that the government found it necessary to make a further advance of \$15,000, before he was in a condition to commence the manufacture of the arms, and the period of the contract was advanced from two years to ten. The manufacture of arms proved a much greater source of immediate profit to Mr. Whitney than his invention of the cotton gin.

On July 18, 1812, Mr. Whitney secured a second contract with the government for the manufacture of 15,000 stand of muskets. In the meanwhile he had also executed a contract with the State of New York. There is evidence in the records of the War Department that he obtained further government contracts. Mr. Whitney died January 8, 1825, at the age of sixty. Colonel North survived him twenty-seven years; and having later turned his attention from the manufacture of pistols to that of rifles, which he began to make in 1823,

\*James Wynne's *Lives of Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of America*. New York, 1850.

*Memoir of Eli Whitney, Esq.* By Denison Olmsted, New Haven, 1846. (In which are included Reminiscences of Mr. Whitney by Professor Silliman of Yale.)

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two years before Mr. Whitney's death, he immediately became prominent as the maker of the best guns used in the United States, "either of foreign or domestic fabrication." The official documents which appear in this Memoir abundantly confirm this statement.

Of the two, Simeon North was the one who rendered the greatest service to the government in this field. He was engaged in it for fifty-three years; Mr. Whitney for twenty-seven. Colonel North manufactured both pistols and guns. He steadily invented and applied many improvements in the mechanism of both forms of arm, and in machinery and tools for their manufacture. His achievements mark a work which by slow, persistent, clear-headed, intuitive mechanical ability, extending quietly and unostentatiously over a half century, did quite as much as that of any other one man to lay the deep and broad foundations of New England's manufacturing supremacy.

As some misunderstanding exists among those interested in the subject, regarding the dates of Colonel North's earlier contracts with the government, it is well at the beginning of this Memoir to correct the error, and make clear, so far as existing records permit, just what his contracts



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were prior to 1813, the year in which he is generally supposed to have begun his work for the government. His first contract was dated March 9, 1799, when he was thirty-four years of age, and was for 500 horse pistols, to be delivered within one year. This contract was followed on February 2, 1800, by a second contract for 1,500 of the same arm, to be delivered within two years. The last of the 2,000 pistols were delivered September 11, 1802. Whether he received any further orders prior to 1808, we are unable to discover; but it is highly probable that he did. On June 30, 1808, he contracted to make 2,000 boarding pistols for the navy, which contract was extended under date of December 4, 1810, by an order for 1,000 additional pistols.

Sometime earlier in the same year, Colonel North contracted with Tench Coxe, Purveyor of Public Supplies, for horse pistols. No contract for these pistols can be found on file. The contract was probably for not less than 5,000 pistols, as 2,400 were still owing on account of it in April, 1813. So that during the fourteen years prior to 1813, Colonel North had been engaged in the manufacture of arms, and had received orders for 3,000

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boarding pistols, and probably 7,000 horse pistols.

It thus appears that Colonel North's entire life after reaching maturity, was devoted to the fabrication of weapons for the defense of his country, at a time when it was in need of just such assistance as he was able and willing to render. Just how great this need was, is little understood by this generation.

A year before the revolutionary war broke out, Great Britain prohibited the exportation of arms to the colonies; notwithstanding the grim significance of this prohibition, the colonies neglected to take the obviously necessary steps to insure the manufacture of a home supply. It was not until war was actually upon them, that the several colonies began to offer premiums for guns and pistols made by local smiths, and some of them to establish armories of their own. In May, 1775, the General Assembly of Connecticut passed an act to encourage the manufacture of firearms and other military stores, for the safety and defense of the province. It provided for the payment of a bounty of 5 s. for every stand of arms "with a good lock" made in the province, and 1 s. 6 d. for every good gun lock, all to be purchased by the Colony to the number



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of 3,000. Other colonies passed similar acts. In 1776, the Continental Congress called upon the executives and legislatures of all the states to exempt from military duty all persons employed in making arms or military stores of any kind. These steps were all too late to avert a scarcity which found the colonies utterly unprepared for the war into which they were driven by the mother country.

Apart from military requirements, the gun was as necessary for the protection of the early settler, and afterwards to the frontiersman, as was the ploughshare for his livelihood. The Indian had accustomed every member of the family to its use, and had made good marksmen out of the raw militia of the Revolution.

When George Washington took command of the Continental army in 1775, under the great elm at Cambridge, he found "a mixed multitude of people, under very little discipline, order or government,"—these are his own words,—“armed with fowling pieces or muskets, hardly any two of which were of the same caliber.”\* Each

\*Cavalry and marine pistols were not much used by the American Continentals during the Revolution. The American "cavalry" was really a mounted infantry, and the American navy dwindled from thirteen small vessels in 1776 to none in 1780. There were, of course, some pistols furnished by the Continental Congress, but no records regarding

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soldier was obliged to carry his own special bullet-mould and cast his own bullets. The four things which the Continental army most needed, from the beginning to the end of the Revolution, were food, clothing, weapons, and ammunition, and most of all they needed the two last named. "Ye Gods give us powder!" was the perpetual cry of General Putnam. Such arms as the Continentals had were either imported, captured from the enemy, or rudely hammered out by the village blacksmiths. Had our army been suitably equipped and supplied with the necessary arms and ammunition, the war by which we achieved our independence would have been much shorter than it was.

The Revolution over, the need for arms remained. These were the days in which hunting was one of the easiest and commonest methods of obtaining a livelihood. The gun and the fishing rod were necessary accessories in the equipment of every rural household. Moreover,

them have yet been found. Only such as Congress furnished belong in the classification as Regulation. The other pistols in use by the Continental privates were, when not either old or personal property, Committee of Safety arms. In the absence of discovered records of Committee of Safety pistols, it is fair to assume that they were made by the same shops and men who furnished muskets. . . . Although the official navy was next to nothing, the unofficial navy was a great power,—the privateer navy. It is believed that during the war



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the times continued to be troublesome, and the clouds hung always above the horizon. Bloody conflicts with the Indians were constantly taking place in the border states. With the administration of John Adams, the troubles with France came on; there was every prospect of another war. Washington was called from his Virginia homestead to take command of the army again; and there were some sea fights between French and American vessels, events which elicited from Charles C. Pinckney of South Carolina, the remark: "Millions for defense, not one cent for tribute," which went echoing through all the glades and woodlands of the states.

Then came the struggle between France and England, at the beginning of which each nation issued orders forbidding all trade with the other, claiming the right at the same time to confiscate all neutral vessels engaged in such trade. Be-

70,000 New Englanders alone engaged in privateering; they must have purchased immense quantities of newly made American pistols. There is at present no way to differentiate Committee of Safety (public service) and Privateer (private service) pistols, but it may be possible if the bills of sale ever come to light. Besides Committee of Safety pistols the cavalry and navy used what they captured, and a few, estimated at two hundred, which Lafayette brought in 1777 in his present of arms. Lafayette had purchased the bulk of them during his recent visit to England. *Firearms in American History.* By Charles Winthrop Sawyer.

yond all this, and most exasperating of all, was the right claimed by England to search American vessels on the high seas, to discover if British seamen were on board, and to seize all such if found, no particular pains being taken to distinguish between British seamen and sailors who were actually American citizens, though born in England. "Whenever a British commander short of men," writes Theodore Roosevelt in his *Naval War of 1812*, "came across an American vessel, he impressed all of her crew that he wanted, whether they were citizens of the United States or not."

Maritime commerce was then the most important industry of the United States, and it was practically destroyed by the arbitrary edicts and acts of England and France. It is easy to understand why the whole country instantly recognized and accepted a duty to resist such an intolerable situation. The embargo which followed was violently opposed, it is true, and the war of 1812, which came later, was not at all popular in the states whose prosperity depended upon the maritime commerce which the embargo destroyed. But it is well to record here the fact that the principles for which the United States contended in that war,



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so far as it grew out of the impressment of her seamen, are now universally accepted; while those which Great Britain asserted with brutal tenacity, find no advocates anywhere in the civilized world.

In the meanwhile the trouble with the Barbary States along the Mediterranean Sea had broken out; and our little squadron of four vessels had done its valiant deeds in those far-off waters. We are rehearsing these familiar facts, in the belief that they furnish the true explanation why Colonel North decided to take up the manufacture of pistols for the government, and that they put patriotism paramount among his motives.

On June 14, 1791, the Congress passed a law prohibiting the exportation of arms and ammunition, and another law admitting foreign-made arms free of duty. These laws indicate the acute distress of the Government, because of its inadequate home supply of arms vital for self defense. That Colonel North felt deeply the outrageous conduct of Great Britain in the impressment of our sailors, and throughout the long controversy with France, and the orders in council, is shown by a letter he wrote to Robert Smith, the Secretary of the Navy, in 1809. He

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had received a letter from the department asking him to push his contract as fast as possible, for the government was anxious that he should furnish more pistols than the contract called for. "Sir," he replied, "I believe it the duty of every American citizen to unite and assist the government at this time in repelling the unjustifiable, tyrannical and imperial orders and decrees heaped upon us by the war-powers of Europe, and you may depend that nothing shall be wanting on my part to support the just rights of the Union; every branch of this business shall be crowded to the greatest extremities."

This sentence is the only one in his correspondence with the Government, so far as preserved, in which Colonel North gave any clue to his private views and opinions. He felt, he was sure, that he was building up a manufacture vitally necessary to the defense and security of his country. The United States had fought for and gained independence; and it was a righteous war. When Simeon North was at the maturity of his powers, gifted in a line where the government sadly needed men of his type, his country became entangled in a maze of foreign complications which threatened to strangle the life out of her. He saw both his opportunity and his



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duty; and it is not for those who come after him to draw subtle lines of distinction between the two. War is a horrible thing; but it was necessary, in those days, for the American people to be prepared for self defense. All that had been gained by the Revolution, the United States was in danger of losing. The preparations made were indeed pitifully inadequate; but Simeon North did more than his full share; and he felt a pride in his accomplishment, a pride in which his descendants can join, even unto the coming of the day when the swords shall be beaten into ploughshares and the war drums shall sound no more.

## CHAPTER II

### THE NORTHS, AND SIMEON NORTH IN PARTICULAR

**S**IMEON NORTH was of the sixth generation in descent from John North, of Farmington, Connecticut, who came from England in 1635, when twenty years old, in the good ship *Susan and Ellen*,\* which brought hither, in numerous voyages, many of the founders of the best known American families.†

John North of Farmington was the progenitor of one of those large families now widely dis-

\* John North, Senior, of Farmington, sailed from London in the *Susan and Ellen*, Edward Payne, Master, and landed at Boston in April, 1635, aged twenty. It is recorded of him and his companions that "These parties hereunder expressed have brought Certificate from Minister and Justices of their Conformitie and that they are no Subsedy Men." [*Original Lists of Emigrants*, Hotten.] John North settled at Ipswich; was a proprietor there, in 1637; sold land in 1644. His land in Farmington was granted him in 1653. He bought his house lot of three-fourths acre, at the north end of Farmington street from John Steele, original owner. He and his sons, John and Samuel, were in the list of eighty-four proprietors among whom the unoccupied lands of Farmington were divided, in 1676. He married Hannah, daughter of Thomas Bird. They were members of Farmington church, which she joined in 1656. He died in 1691, aged 76 years. They had six sons and three daughters.

† There were other John Norths among the forefathers of the numerous North progeny of the present day. A John North, aged twenty-two, came to Virginia in the ship *Primrose* in the same year, 1635, as our



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persed in all sections of the United States, which have furnished marked types of the sturdy integrity and intelligence of the New England character. In studying the genealogy of the North family we are struck by the large families which marked each generation. Six sons and three daughters were born to the first John North; Thomas, the second in the branch, had five sons and five daughters; the third, Thomas 2nd, had eight children; the fourth, Isaac, had eight; the fifth, Jedediah, had six sons and five daughters, who together bore him seventy grand-

John North, and the John North who witnessed Lawrence Washington's will was one of his descendants. A third John North came also to Virginia in the following year, in the ship *Assurance*. A Nathaniel North appears in the original list as living in the Bermudas in 1662, and an Edward North, who came from Bermuda, was a merchant in Charleston, South Carolina, during the Revolution, and was imprisoned in one of the British prison ships. There was a Thomas North on the "list of men living" in Elizabeth City, Virginia, February 16, 1623. A fourth John North came from Ireland to Maine in 1730 and founded the North family which has been made illustrious by many descendants in that state. This family claims descent from the Guilford Norths of England and Ireland, so intimately associated with many stirring events in the history of the mother country, and best known and well hated in the colonies, through Lord Frederick North, Earl of Guilford, prime minister of George III, and author of the Boston port bill of 1774, which precipitated the Revolution. One of the members of the Maine family was William North, who led a battalion in the battle of Monmouth, and in 1779 became an aid to Baron Steuben, and was with him at the surrender of Cornwallis. General North was so beloved by Steuben that the latter willed him half his property. So far as is known, there was no relationship between any of these five progenitors of the North family of the United States.

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children. "The descendants of John North, Sr.," writes a family chronicler, "are now numbered by the thousand, and are scattered from Maine to California. Among them are found soldiers in three American wars, physicians of great eminence, lawyers, ministers, missionaries, presidents and professors of colleges, teachers, manufacturers, and men of affairs."\*

Simeon North, born July 13, 1765, was the fourth son of Jedediah and Sarah (Wilcox) North. There were two younger brothers and five sisters, three of them by a second wife. Jedediah, like all his progenitors in this country, was a farmer. His house at the north end of the village of Berlin, Connecticut, still stands, but sad to say, is now used as a barn. The family had lived in Berlin since the days of Thomas 2nd, who was one of the company of pioneers from Farmington, in the settlement at Christian Lane, begun in 1686, now a country by-road of the town of Berlin.

Of Simeon North's brothers, Asa removed to Vermont, as did also Noah; Levi remained in

\* The first federal census of 1790 recorded ninety-two families named North, with a membership of 585, or an average of 6.4 members to a family. These ninety-two families were located, one in Maine, three in Vermont, three in Massachusetts, thirty-three in Connecticut, eighteen in New York, sixteen in Pennsylvania, two in Maryland, seven in Virginia, three in North Carolina, and six in South Carolina.





HOUSE IN WHICH SIMEON NORTH WAS BORN





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Berlin; David removed to New York state, as did also Stephen. Nearly all these brothers and sisters had large families, two of them twelve children, and one of them fourteen; one of the sisters, Olive, was the wife of Elisha Cheney the celebrated clockmaker.

Like his father and grandfather before him, Simeon North began life as a farmer. Deacon Frederick North is authority for the statement that in 1781, his grandfather, Simeon, on the day he was sixteen years of age, shouldered his gun and tramped all the way to Saybrook, where he had heard that men were being enlisted for the Continental army. But when he reached his destination, rumors had preceded him that negotiations for peace were pending, and the officer in charge refused to enlist him. It was on October 19 of that year, that the conquered troops of Lord Cornwallis marched out of Yorktown and laid down their arms before the allied armies of Washington and Rochambeau. The names of all three of Simeon's elder brothers, Asa, Levi, and David, appear in the published lists of "Connecticut men of the Revolution."

In 1786, when twenty-one years old, Simeon North married Lucy, daughter of Jonathan and Elizabeth Ranney Savage, of Berlin. She died

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February 24, 1811. In the twenty-two years of their married life there were born to them eight children, five sons and three daughters. For his second wife, he married Lydia, daughter of Reverend Enoch Huntington, of Middletown, and one daughter was born to them who married, in 1836, the Reverend Dwight M. Seward, pastor of the First Congregational church of New Britain. Four of his five sons, Reuben, James, Alvin, and Selah, were engaged with him in his business. The fifth, Simeon North, Jr., went to Yale College, where he graduated in 1825, the valedictorian of his class. He studied for the ministry, was a tutor at Yale for two years, 1828-9, was then appointed Professor of Latin and Greek in Hamilton College, filling the chair for ten years, when he was elected the fifth President of the college, serving from 1839 to 1857. Doctor North resigned in the latter year, after the longest and most successful administration in the history of the institution. It was during his presidency that Doctor Edward North, his nephew, became the Professor of Latin and Greek at Hamilton, where he remained for fifty-seven years, beloved by all the students, to whom he was familiarly known as "Old Greek." He was made Professor *Emeritus* when



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he resigned in 1901, fourteen months before his death, September 13, 1903.\*

Town records show that Simeon North's farm of  $66\frac{1}{4}$  acres was made up of several purchases, including land in the counties of Hartford and Middlesex. On June 10, 1795, Simeon North purchased land on Spruce brook, adjoining his farm, on which was an old-fashioned saw mill. The deed secured to him rights in the mill, the mill yard and dam. It was at this place that he soon after started the business of making scythes.

Before 1808, Simeon was sole owner of the mill property, on which he had built a large factory addition of two stories above the basement, which was used as a forging room. The bridge directly south of the factory, over the stream that furnished water power was built to serve as a dam also, and a sort of gangway, used by the workmen led from the bridge to the first floor of the shop. The business of sawing lumber was continued, and the logs were shoved into the ground floor of the mill from the east side by a tram road.

The dwelling house, purchased from Eben and Isaac Dudley, was on the south side of the

*\* Old Greek: An Old Time Professor in an Old Fashioned College.*  
By S. N. D. North. New York, 1905.

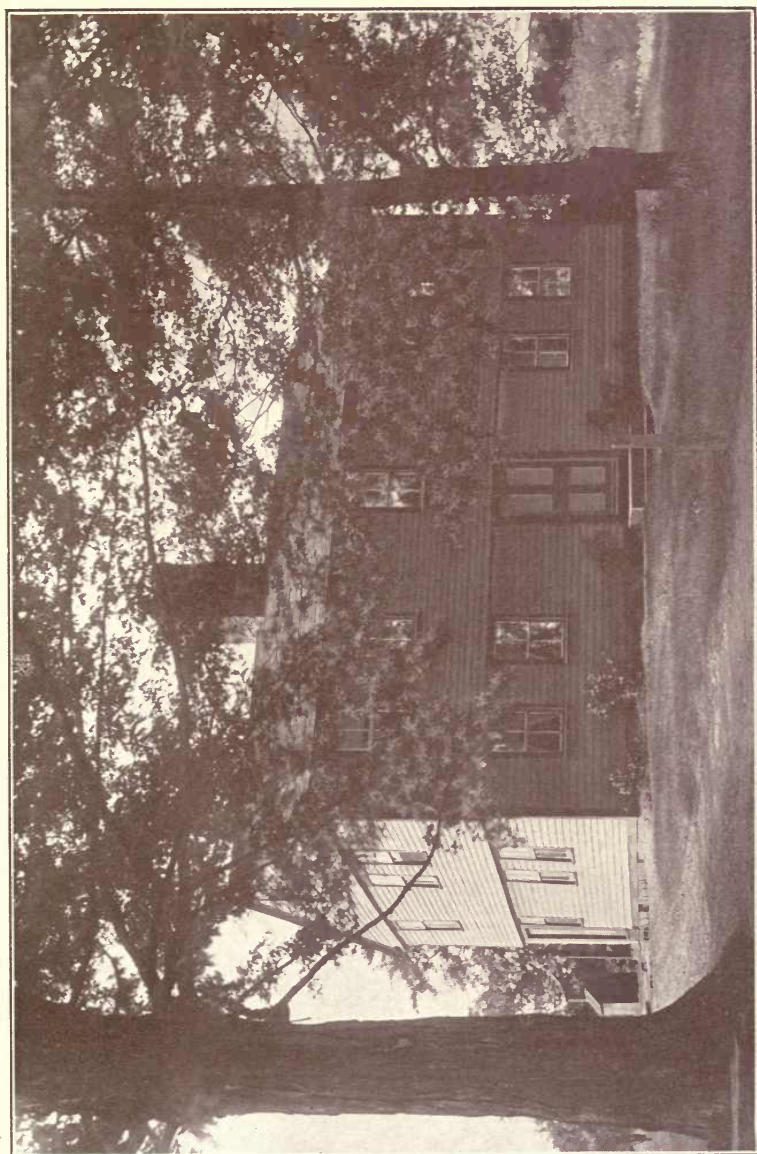
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way, next east of the shop, at the top of the hill. Improved and enlarged, it was the home of the Norths for more than half a century. A large addition at the rear has been torn away, but the main part still stands. The highway on which this property is situated is the first running east and west, next north of Lamentation mountain.

The descendants of the pioneers have been shockingly careless with the records of their business transactions, in which were written the early industrial history of the country. Those of Simeon North did not differ from others in this respect; they did not realize that these simple records would possess significance and value to their successors. Colonel North's will refers to a "secretary, valise, chests, boxes and trunks" which were to be preserved "for the accommodation of my books and papers during the settlement of my estate and as much longer as may seem expedient for the custody of said books and papers; and when the purpose of preserving them shall have been answered, they may be sold and the avails thereof divided as aforesaid." This unfortunate provision of the will was carried out to the letter, as the most careful search fails to disclose any of his private books





THE BERLIN HOMESTEAD



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or papers, save parts of two account books, kept by his oldest son, Reuben, and beginning in 1808, which throw considerable light upon the early business conducted in the Spruce brook factory. In the five years covered by the first of these account books, many scythes were made and sold, mostly one at a time, to the neighborhood farmers in Berlin, Meriden, Middletown, Chatham and Glastonbury, a considerable range of territory; and it seems probable that in the early days at least, there was little or no competition in a business which combined the manufacture and the retail selling of this indispensable article in the farmer's outfit. The prices ran from 75 cents to \$1.67, according to size and quality. A scythe four feet long was sold for \$1.50. These are prices for hand-made implements which will astonish the modern purchaser of machine-made scythes. The account book records transactions with one William H. Imlay, from whom was purchased German steel at 15½ cents a pound, and blistered steel at 16 cents, and who bought the finished product in wholesale lots. On two occasions 10½ dozen scythes were delivered to him at \$1.00 each. Occasionally there was a turn by barter, as on July 11, "to one scythe delivered to a Gentleman



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from Middletown Upper Houses to cancel a debt of \$1.40, contracted for fish." Sea coal was 50 cents a bushel and charcoal cost \$7.00 per 100 bushels.

The account book throws an interesting light upon the wages paid in the early years of the century. Joseph Henderson "agreed to blow and strike awelding pistols at \$12.00 per month." "Selah Goodrich came to work for three months at \$6.00 per month and three months after at \$8.00 per month." These were contracts made after the manufacture of pistols had been undertaken.

Many of the workmen boarded with one or another family of the Norths, and the account books show that the workmen were charged \$1.25 per week for board, and counted out all meals when absent. Washing was included in the board.

As his business grew, Simeon North employed a steadily increasing number of skilled workmen, the larger contracts of his later years often requiring the aid of a hundred or more mechanics. Skilled workmen were hard to find in those days, and a great proportion of those employed in the gun shop were apprentices, growing up under the eye and the training of the master. Thus

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there came to exist between him and his people a peculiarly intimate relationship, very different from anything seen in these days between employer and employee. It is a family tradition that always on his return from one of his many journeys to Washington or elsewhere, which often involved long absences, Simeon would go through his shops, calling each workman by name, shaking hands with him, and inquiring for the members of his family. There are many legends of merry winter evenings passed around the big log fire in the kitchen of Simeon North's homestead, where master and men exchanged experiences. These were the patriarchal days of American manufacturing, when there was that something in common between master and man, which has long ceased to exist; the days when this common interest took the place of the modern trade union; the days when the workmen felt that their welfare was safe in the hands of the master because of a sympathetic bond and a mutual interest. As the factories have grown bigger, and impersonality has taken the place of this mutuality of feeling, something fine has gone out of our industrial life, inevitably perhaps, which nothing can ever replace.

Two traditions survive Simeon North, which

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throw a great light on his personal character. One has it that no man ever worked for him, who did not love him. The other has it that he would never employ a man who was intemperate in habits or immoral in any way. From boyhood he was an earnest advocate of the temperance movement. Throughout his long life, he commanded the respect of all who knew him, and the affection of all his family and neighbors. In his old age it was the custom of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, to gather at his home each Sunday noon, after church, for an hour of family intercourse. He was exceedingly fond of children, whom he always made welcome.

What has been written above is the surest key we have to the personality of Simeon North. On the day of his death his grandson, Dr. Edward North, wrote in his diary: "My earliest memories were associated with him. When I was a boy he often rode out to my father's from Middletown on business. He always came in an old-fashioned two-wheeled carriage, and was always telling stories and smoking cigars. He received contracts for making firearms from every President from Washington down." \*

\* This is an error. The first contract was during the administration of John Adams.



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That he was a man of genial temperament is clear from this and many other reminiscences. Unlike most of his ancestors, he was not a member of the village Congregational Church, but he was a regular attendant and essentially a religious man, and a generous supporter of the church; he brought up a family of sons and daughters who learned from him the principles of personal honor, the dignity of conscientious labor, the need for square dealing with every one, and the necessity for self-reliance.

While Simeon North had not the advantage of college training, he had a well disciplined mind, was well informed, and kept up with the world's affairs by reading the New York papers, which he used to lend to his neighbors.

That he appreciated the value of education is shown from the fact that he helped to establish the first Berlin Academy, incorporated 1802, of which Miss Emma Hart, a native of the town, afterward Mrs. Emma Willard of Troy Seminary, was one of the early teachers. He sent his youngest son to college and found pride in the noble career that was builded upon that foundation.

The correspondence that appears in this Memoir shows that Colonel North did not always

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spell his words with the precise accuracy required in these modern days; but it is to be remembered that he was sixty-three years old when the first Webster's dictionary was printed, and it was a period when most men spelled many words in a way quite different from the spelling adopted by the schools. One thing in particular will strike every one who takes the trouble to read these letters. They were written to officials, many of them high in the government service, men with whom he had business relations, and upon whose good will his business prosperity depended. There is a simple directness about the letters which is remarkable; he wrote just what it was necessary to say, in the fewest and simplest words, always making his meaning as clear as crystal; moreover, he always did just what he said he would do. Every letter is dignified, and marked by language of proper respect; but nowhere appears any sign of cringing, any note of flattery, any suggestion of self-adulation or vaunting, or any intimation that he did not feel himself a man dealing with men on terms of man's equality in the American creed. His descendants cannot read these letters without a feeling of genuine pride in the character of the man who penned them in his clear and precise chirography.

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Many of them were written at times when he was under great financial stress; when his whole future and that of the many people dependent upon him, turned upon the answer. Not a sign of all this appears, not an appeal for sympathy or for any consideration not based upon the merits of his proposition and the full value of all to be received as the fruit of his work.

He never had a partner in his business, except a short time, about 1811, when he entered into some sort of working agreement with his brother-in-law, Elisha Cheney, the clock manufacturer, who for a time finished some of the screws and pins used in the pistols. All of the government contracts were signed by himself alone, and all arms made for the United States were stamped only with the familiar name, S. North.

Simeon North was a man of tireless industry. Blessed with perfect health until old age began to tell upon him, he was always up and about his works, except when absent on long and tiresome journeys. His alert and creative mind was always busy with the manifold and perplexing problems of the business which he was teaching himself and the world how to solve. Up to his time, the manufacture of pistols had never been undertaken, except as they were forged by the



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village blacksmith, one by one, with the simplest tools of those primitive days. He devised the tools and machines for making their separate parts, to be afterwards assembled in parcels, and was the first manufacturer to enter into a contract to make arms, the parts of which should be interchangeable one with the other.

At the moment when, all difficulties overcome, the enlarged factory in perfect working order, and ample business from a government highly pleased with his product, Colonel North was ready to pursue a more leisurely life and enjoy some of the fruits of his labors, catastrophe fell upon him out of a clear sky. In 1826, when he was sixty-one years old, the failure of a business house whose notes he had endorsed, compelled him to make a temporary assignment. It is useless to recall in this connection the name of the establishment in question. Descendants of members of the family are still living in New England, and are respected members of their communities. The incident is of moment for the purposes of this Memoir, because of the limelight it throws upon the character of Simeon North. His endorsement had been procured by misrepresentations on the part of the makers of the notes; and his counsel advised him that he could

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not be held for their payment. Against their advice and protest, he said that his name was on the back of these notes, no matter how it got there, and that if he lived long enough, he would pay them. With the fine courage and energy which marked everything he did, he set about arranging affairs with the creditors, and by placing a mortgage of \$68,000 upon his property, he was able to continue his business without interruption. For twenty-two years he carried that burden, so shamefully imposed upon him; and in 1848, when he had reached the age of eighty-three years, he paid off the last penny of these other people's indebtedness, including interest, and amounting in all to more than \$100,000.

But for this experience, Colonel North would have been a very rich man, as wealth was measured in those days. As it was, he died comparatively poor, but with the clear conscience without which, to men of his type, life is not worth living. The ethical business standards which governed Colonel North are by no means unknown, or even rare, in our day and generation. But it certainly cannot be said that they are those which commonly prevail; and that presents another reason why

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it is well to preserve the memory of such a man.

Simeon North was so engrossed in the cares and perplexities of his business that he was able to give little time to neighborhood affairs; but he was always deeply interested in the welfare of his neighbors, and constantly rendered them helpful service. He never held any town or city civic office, and does not appear to have been specially interested in political matters. In 1811 he was elected Lieutenant Colonel of the Sixth Connecticut regiment; this post he resigned in 1813, because of his frequent absences from home. But ever afterwards he was known to his neighbors as Colonel North, and so we shall call him in this Memoir.

The picture of Simeon North which furnishes the frontispiece of this Memoir, is reproduced from a daguerreotype taken the year before his death, when he was eighty-six years old. It reveals the strong and kindly features of the man; but the erect and stalwart figure, the piercing eye and the strong lines of character in his face are gone. An old family letter describes him "as tall and straight, with a fine forehead and white silky hair." So far as known the daguerreotype from which the frontispiece is



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reproduced was the only picture ever taken of Simeon North.

Such was the man whose memory we venture to recall and perpetuate; and such was his life and character:

Toiling, rejoicing, sorrowing,  
Onward through life he goes;  
Each morning sees some task begun,  
Each evening sees it close;  
Something attempted, something done,  
Has earned a night's repose.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FIRST PISTOL CONTRACTS

**J**UST when the attention of Simeon North was first directed to the need and the opportunity of the pistol manufacture, we have no means of knowing. One writer has stated that during his young manhood, following the close of the Revolutionary war, he made pistols for private sale. There is no family tradition to that effect. But it was in line with his business of a general machinist; it appealed to his natural taste as a mechanic of unusual talents and to his intuitive instincts as an inventor; it was a wholly open field; and it is quite possible that he had entered it in a small way prior to his first venture as a government contractor. We cannot find that there was any one in the country at the time who was regularly engaged in the manufacture; and the need of his country was dire and imperative. We know that in Beckley Quarter, about one mile distant from Simeon North's birthplace,



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lived Elias Beckley, Sr., who died in 1816 at the age of eighty-one, and who had a gun shop at that place, which was inherited by his son Elias Beckley, Jr., who died in 1828. A tradition of the neighborhood has it that one day as the Beckleys were testing a new gun, a stranger walked around the corner just in time to receive the full charge in his breast, and was instantly killed. That Simeon North learned the rudiments of the trade from Elias Beckley, we may venture to guess. What we do know, or at least what there is no means of disproving, is that Simeon North was the first official pistol manufacturer of the United States government, and probably the first man in the country to enter upon the manufacture of pistols as the main branch of his business. Up to 1823, when he secured his first gun contract, he appears to have been the exclusive civilian maker of pistols for the government.\* His first contract with the government of which we have any knowledge, was dated March 9, 1799, when he was thirty-four years of age, and was

\*The report of Colonel Bomford of the Ordnance Department, under date of December 27, 1822, furnishing an account of all the small arms made in the two government armories at Springfield and Harper's Ferry, between the years 1795 and 1821, states that 2,880 pistols were made at Harper's Ferry in 1807, and 1,208 in 1808, and 1,000 were made at Springfield, in 1818.



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for 500 horse pistols at \$6.50 each.† The contract itself is not to be found, but the fact that it was executed appears from subsequent records. The absence of the contract itself is accounted for by the fact that all the records of the War Department prior to 1800 were burned in the fire which destroyed the war office on November 12, 1800. A large portion of the records of the War Department between that date and August 25, 1814, when the British troops entered the National Capital and burned most of the government buildings, were also destroyed.

The history of this and other arms contracts of the same period is interesting. In 1798, Congress passed an act, approved May 4, appropriating \$800,000 for the purchase of arms and ammunition for the government. Immediately following this legislation, contracts were made for 40,000 muskets, 10,000 of which were allotted to Eli Whitney, under contract dated January 14, 1798. On October 15, 1798, Nathan Starr was awarded a contract for swords, and Simeon North the contract for 500 horse pistols, above referred to.

†Mr. Sawyer states that as early as 1794 Colonel North received a government contract for 500 pistols, but we have been unable to find any evidence of such a contract in the official records.

Gluckman, 1939, Concludes that this →  
pistol is Model 1810.



Horse pistol; model of 1799-1800. Length 14 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Length of barrel 9 inches. Caliber, 69.  
Brass mountings.





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On February 6, 1800, before the completion of his first contract, he entered into a second contract for 1500 similar pistols to be delivered within two years.

Colonel Decius Wadsworth, writing to the Secretary of War on June 6, 1814, said: "Many of the individuals of small property who engaged in those contracts were absolutely ruined thereby, and the difficulties were so much greater than had been apprehended, it proved in general a losing business to those concerned." That disaster did not overtake all who engaged in the business, is evident from the fact that Starr, Whitney and North continued in the manufacture of arms under government contracts to the end of their lives.

It is not probable that any of these men received further contracts under this act, as the appropriation was doubtless exhausted before their first contracts were completed.

The energy that characterized Simeon North's operations throughout his long business life, is strikingly illustrated by the way he went about the execution of this first contract.

The Whitney contract ante-dated Simeon North's by fourteen months, and that of Starr by five months, and yet he was the

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first of the three to make a delivery. The books of the accounting department of the War Department show that on February 27, 1801, he had received credit for 500 pistols. It would seem that the 1799 contract must have been completed some time before the pistols were passed to Colonel North's credit; for in a War Department letter book we find the following copy of a letter which indicates that the work was well advanced on the second contract at that time:

WAR DEPARTMENT,  
7th Feby 1801.

DAVID AMES,  
SIR:

Mr. Simeon North informs me that he will in a short time have 1,000 pistol barrels fabricated under contract for the United States, ready for proof. You will be pleased to send an experienced armorer to Berlin for the purpose as soon as Mr. North advises you of being ready.

*(Copy not signed.)*

In only one instance during the fifty-two years in which he was engaged in the business, was Colonel North obliged to ask for any extended indulgence in the time specified for final delivery of arms. That was on the contract of 1813, and was due to the delays incident to the building and equipping of an entire new



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plant for the manufacture of arms under conditions altogether new in the manufacturing business.

His second contract, to which the letter above quoted evidently relates, was signed on behalf of the government by James McHenry, Secretary of War. This contract is preserved in the files of the War Department, and its full text is given:

CONTRACT OF FEBRUARY 6, 1800

1895347

1,500 Pistols to be delivered at Middletown in Connecticut within two years and manufactured within the United States by Simeon North.

Agreed upon 6 February 1800.

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Articles of Agreement made on the sixth day of February Anno Domini, one thousand eight hundred, between James McHenry Esquire, Secretary of the Department of War for and on behalf of the United States of America of the one part and Simeon North of Berlin in the State of Connecticut of the other part.

First.—The said Simeon North for himself, his heirs, Executors and Administrators, contracts and agrees to manufacture within United States and deliver at Middletown, in the State of Connecticut, within two years from the date hereof to such person or persons as shall be appointed to receive the same by the Secretary of War for the time being, Fifteen hundred pistols, made and finished in the manner



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hereinafter mentioned, the deliveries to be made at such times within the said period of two years and in such parcels of not less than Five hundred in each parcel as shall be most agreeable to him the said Simeon North.

Second.—The aforesaid pistols are to be made and finished in a workmanlike manner and of good materials, free from cracks and flaws in every part, smooth bored to an exact cylinder, and in fashion, goodness of materials and finish in all respects similar and not inferior to a pattern pistol to be furnished to the party of the second part upon his receipt, except that the Bore or Calibre of the pistol is to be the same with that of the pattern Charleville Musket and that the Barrel and Ramrod are each to be one inch longer than the pattern: and also that that part of the Breech of the pistol which lies within the Brass may be formed round on the under part instead of being squared, but it is agreed that the two squares shall be retained one on each side of the Breech as necessary to give a firm position to the barrels within the Brass work. It is particularly required and agreed that the works of the Lock must be of the best Iron, the Steel used for the springs and the face of the hammer of the first quality, and that the stock must be formed of well seasoned Walnut, and all possible care taken that the grain of the wood shall correspond with the curve or bend of the Stock.

Third.—The pistols shall be proved at Berlin aforesaid, by a person or persons to be appointed by the Secretary of War for the time being, and as soon as five hundred Barrels are ready for proof, due notice thereof being given to the party of the first part

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the proof thereof shall be made, and on like notice, with respect to each successive five hundred necessary to make up the whole number, fifteen hundred, proof shall also be made of them. The proof to consist in each Barrel being charged with one eighteenth part of a pound of powder, (the strength of which has been previously ascertained by a proper officer to be equal to throw a twenty four pound Ball, from a Five and half Inch Howitz, at an elevation of forty five degrees, seventy yards, with a charge of one ounce thereof) and a leaden Bullet which will exactly fit the Bore of the Pistol and standing the discharge of the same, after which the person proving shall mark each Barrel so proved with a stamp provided for that purpose.

Fourth.—The pistols shall also be inspected at Berlin aforesaid by a person or persons to be appointed by the Secretary of War for the time being, and as soon as five hundred pistols are finally completed and put together, and ready for inspection, due notice thereof being given to the party of the first part, the inspection thereof shall be made, and on like notice with respect to each successive five hundred, necessary to make up the whole number, fifteen hundred, inspection shall also be made of them. The inspection to consist in a careful examination of each pistol to see that it corresponds in every particular with the pattern, except as before mentioned, is free from cracks and flaws, made and finished in a workmanlike manner, and that the locks are sufficiently strong in their springs, and the stocks in wood and other particulars correspond with this agreement. The Wages of the prover and Inspector

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and all incidental expenses attending the proof and inspection as aforesaid shall be bourne by the United States. .

Fifth.—The party of the first part contracts and agrees for and on behalf of the United States to pay Six Dollars for each and every pistol which shall be manufactured conformably to the pattern with the exceptions agreed upon, stand the proof, pass inspection and be delivered at Middletown aforesaid, and to furnish the said Simeon North with fifteen hundred flints for the said pistols. And it is understood by the said parties that no compensation or allowance can be demanded for pistols which may not stand proof or shall be rejected on inspection on account of their disagreement with the pattern in fashion or otherwise save in the particulars provided for or within the true intent and meaning of this Contract.

Sixth.—Two thousand Dollars shall be paid and advanced to the party of the second part on closing this Contract, all further advances shall be made at the discretion of the Secretary of the Department of War for the time being and regulated in proportion to the progress made in the manufacture and finishing of the pistols contracted for. The whole residue beyond the advance, or advances that may be made of the price or amount of the whole fifteen hundred pistols, at the rate of six Dollars, for each and every pistol contracted for, which after proof and inspection shall be delivered and receipted for at Middletown by a person appointed for the purpose, on the part of the United States, to be immediately and without delay, upon such delivery of the whole fifteen hundred



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pistols, and receipt for the same, fully paid and satisfied.

(SEAL OF THE  
WAR OFFICE)

In witness whereof the said Secretary of the Department of War for and on behalf of the United States of America, hath hereunto subscribed his name, and affixed the seal of the War Office; and the said Simeon North hath also subscribed his name and affixed his seal the day and year first above written.

JAMES McHENRY

*Sec. of War*

SIMEON NORTH [SEAL]

Signed, Sealed and delivered  
in the presence of  
JOHN CALDWELL  
N<sup>N</sup> JONES

This contract called for the completion and delivery of the 1,500 pistols by February 6, 1802. The records show that the contract was not fully discharged until September 11, of that year. Considerable correspondence passed between Colonel North and the War Department in the interval; the letters cannot be found; but in the files of the Department are memoranda entries indicating the substance of Colonel North's letters, but giving no clew to the answers that were sent. These memoranda are found in the "Letters Received" books,

## SIMEON NORTH

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War Department file, and show the following seven letters received from Simeon North, 1800 to 1810:

*Dated:*

- Nov. 10, 1800—Berlin. Relating to contracts for pistols and requesting an advance of money thereon.
- Dec. 18, 1800—Berlin, Conn. Relating to his contract for pistols and number he will soon have ready for proof.
- July 27, 1801—Berlin, Conn. Requesting a person be sent to prove the remainder of the pistol barrels for the pistols to complete his contract.
- Not dated —Received Dec. 16, 1801—Memorandum of work to be done under the contract of Simeon North—1500 pistols.
- Jan. 16, 1802—Berlin. Requesting that he may be indulged with an extension of time to complete the pistols under his contract.
- Apr. 7, 1802—Berlin. Requesting to be informed where he shall deliver the pistols fabricated by him.
- Not dated —Received between Dec. 6 and 11, 1810—Berlin, Conn. Cost of manufacturing 2,000 pistols.



## FIRST PISTOL CONTRACTS

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The last of these letters, could it be found, would undoubtedly throw an interesting light upon one phase of our subject, regarding which we have no information from any source. What it actually cost Colonel North to manufacture the pistols for which the government paid him six dollars each, we have no light.

This contract reveals that the government agreed to advance to Simeon North the sum of \$2,000 on the date of its signing, and to make further advances "in proportion to the progress made in the manufacture and finishing of the pistols," these advances to be made "at the discretion of the Secretary of the Department of War." The memoranda of correspondence above quoted shows that Colonel North made one request for such an advance, before the completion of his contract on November 10, 1800.

The practice of the government in making these advances, was a necessary condition in the larger contracts, at this period in our history. These were days of small capital, small shops and primitive methods. Colonel North could not have equipped his factory for this large undertaking, except with the aid of the government advance. It was good policy on



## SIMEON NORTH

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the part of the government, which was confronted by the necessity of thus encouraging private enterprises, if it was to secure the means of self-defense. It was in line with the acts of Congress, prohibiting the exportation of arms and ammunition, and admitting imported arms free of duty. The nation was already in troublesome times, and was anxiously anticipating the days when it would need all the implements of defense its citizens could be induced to make for its use.

As already stated, Colonel North completed his second pistol contract of February 6, 1800, on September 11, 1802, which was eight months later than the date originally stipulated. The brief-book of the department quoted above, indicates a request on January 16, 1802, that he might be granted an extension of time; and in the absence of any record to the contrary, it may be assumed that the request was granted. Other correspondence, which is reproduced below, shows that the contract was carried out to the satisfaction of the government, and that at the settlement of the account a balance was found due Colonel North of \$3,064. The total sum involved, for 1,500 pistols at \$6.00 each, was \$9,000. If there was any profit

## FIRST PISTOL CONTRACTS

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on these early contracts it must have been small.

The letters which follow are interesting, as showing an error in the office of the Accountant, whereby a delivery of pistols under the contract of March 9, 1799, was confused with deliveries under the later contract, and an overcharge alleged, an error subsequently discovered and rectified in the letter of March 3, 1801:

THE ACCOUNTANT TO THE SUPERINTENDENT AT  
PHILADELPHIA

ACCOUNTANT'S OFFICE,  
February 27th 1801

SAM<sup>L</sup>. HODGDON ESQ<sup>R</sup>.  
Superintend<sup>t</sup> of Stores, Ph<sup>a</sup>.

SIR

Simeon North, Contractor at Berlin Conn<sup>t</sup> for the manufacturing of Pistols has received a credit on the Books of this Office for four hundred and ninety Pistols delivered Joseph Williams, Pay master & Store keeper at Springfield Massachusetts and for ten Pistols delivered Jn<sup>o</sup> Harris Storekeeper at Philadelphia—You will therefore please to make the necessary entries on the Books of your Office.

I am &c

W. S.\*

\*The initials signed to this and subsequent letters are those of the accountant, who copied these letters into the official letter book without signing his full name, which it is impossible to ascertain.

## SIMEON NORTH

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THE ACCOUNTANT TO COLONEL NORTH

February 27, 1801.

MR. SIMEON NORTH,  
Berlin Conn.<sup>t</sup>

SIR

Two receipts have been presented to this Office by Sam<sup>l</sup> W. Dana Esq.<sup>r</sup> for the delivery of 500 Pistols agreeably to your Contract with the Sec.<sup>y</sup> of War dated the 6th February 1800 from which an account has been started wherein you are credited with them at 6 dollars each, amounting to 3000 doll<sup>s</sup>—and debited with the monies received by you, leaving a balance due to the United States of Four thousand seven hundred forty nine dollars & 33/100, for which sum you will be held accountable on the Books of this Office—I observe you have charged for 10 Pistols at the rate of 6 50/100 d.<sup>rs</sup> each, which cannot be admitted as it exceeds your contract.

I am &c

W. S.

THE ACCOUNTANT TO COLONEL NORTH

ACCOUNTANT'S OFFICE,  
March 3d 1801.

MR. SIMEON NORTH  
Berlin Conn.<sup>t</sup>

SIR

Since writing you on the 27<sup>th</sup> ult. I have discovered that the 500 pistols delivered by you were under the Contract of the 9 March 1799 instead of the 6<sup>th</sup> Feb<sup>y</sup> 1800, and in consequence of which I have caused a further credit given you on the books of this Office



## FIRST PISTOL CONTRACTS

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of 50 cts. each, amounting to 250 dollars, leaving a balance due to The United States of D<sup>r</sup> 4,499, 33/100 for which you will be held accountable—

I am &c

W. S.

THE ACCOUNTANT TO COLONEL NORTH

ACCOUNTANT'S OFFICE,  
September 11/1802.

M<sup>r</sup> SIMEON NORTH,  
Berlin, Connecticut.

SIR,

I have received your letter enclosing your account for the manufacturing and delivery of Fifteen hundred pistols under Contract with the Secretary of War dated the 6th of February 1800; which has been examined and a balance found due to you of Three thousand and sixty four Dollars, which sum you will receive from the Treasurer of the United States on granting your duplicate Receipts, one of which please to transmit to this Office.—

I am &c.

W. S.

THE ACCOUNTANT TO WILLIAM IRVINE

September 11, 1802.

WILLIAM IRVINE ESQ<sup>r</sup>  
Philadelphia.

SIR,

Simeon North of Berlin in the State of Connecticut, has received a credit at this Office for Fifteen hundred pistols manufactured by him under Contract with the Sec<sup>y</sup> of War dated 6th Feb<sup>y</sup> 1800 & delivered

## SIMEON NORTH

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to Timothy Phelps Storekeeper at New Haven: of which be pleased to make the proper Entries on the Books of your Office.

I am &c.

W. S.

The exact terms of a number of the subsequent contracts between Colonel North and the United States government are given in the following pages. These contracts were unearthed from the archives of the War and Navy Departments at Washington, as described in the introductory note, and now first come to public knowledge.

There can be found no documentary evidence to indicate that Colonel North did any further work for the government, after completing his second contract in 1802, for a period of six years, although it is quite possible that he secured additional orders on this contract. It is to be inferred that during this interval, Colonel North resumed and increased his manufacture of scythes and other farmers' implements, which he continued to carry on until about 1811, as is shown by the account book of Reuben North, his son and assistant, already referred to. After that year he evidently abandoned all other business, and devoted his entire plant to the manu-



## FIRST PISTOL CONTRACTS

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facture of arms, as from this date all entries relate to the pistol and gun business.

On April 30, 1808, Colonel North wrote to the Navy Department, proposing a contract for the manufacture of boarding pistols. This letter cannot be found; it appears that it was enclosed to Joseph Hull, Navy Agent at New London, Conn., with directions, and that no copy was retained at Washington. The reply of the Secretary of the Navy is found in "General Letter Book 9," page 202, together with his letter to Agent Hull:

ROBERT SMITH TO SIMEON NORTH

General Letter Book, 9  
L Aug. 1807-13 May 1809.  
p. 202. AHE.

NAVY DEPAR<sup>T</sup>  
6 May 1808.

MR. SIMEON NORTH  
Hartford County  
Connecticut.

Your letter of the 30th ulto has been received and referred with directions to Jos. Hull Esq. Navy Agent at New London—Mr. Hull will see you upon the Subject—and if I should find from his report, that you will engage to deliver at a moderate price & within a reasonable time, 2000 pistols, of the kind he will describe to you, or of which he will shew to you a Pattern, I may engage that number of you.

R.<sup>T</sup> SMITH.



## SIMEON NORTH

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ROBERT SMITH TO JOSEPH HULL

General Letter Book 9  
1 Aug. 1807—13 May 1809  
p. 202—AHE.

NAVY DEPAR<sup>T</sup>  
6 May 1808.

JOSEPH HULL ESQ.  
New London, C<sup>t</sup>

I enclose a letter from Mr. Simeon North dated 30 ulto.

Has he any well seasoned wood for Pistol Stocks?\* It requires two years to season wood for such purpose—Procure from Capt. Hull a Pattern of a boarding pistol, shew it to Mr. North & ascertain from him & inform me, upon what terms & within what period of time, he would engage to deliver to you at New London—2000 Pistols to be made agreeably to such pattern. Tell Capt. Hull to give you a pattern of the kind most approved, & best finished. He can write to Capt. Chauncey at New York if he has not one already.

R<sup>T</sup> SMITH.

At the end of the month Colonel North received a pattern pistol from Agent Hull, and he thereupon wrote the following letter to the Secretary of the Navy:

\*The woods chiefly used were 'cherry, red birch, red maple, curly maple, American black walnut and dogwood.—*Sawyer*.

## FIRST PISTOL CONTRACTS

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SIMEON NORTH TO ROBERT SMITH

Miscellaneous Letters 1808,  
Vol. 4, p. 51 AHE.

BERLIN, 30th May 1808

HON. SIR

I have this day received a pattern pistol from the Hon. Joseph Hull Esq. of Derby. It being a large Navy pistol nearly one third larger than a common horseman's pistol, I find on examining s<sup>d</sup> pistol there may be some alterations which may be much to the advantage of the United States, which is as follows (viz) A strap of iron running from the britch pin to the cap which would be a very grate support to the stock, also the pans to be made of brass insted of iron, some other small alterations in the different parts might be made to the advantage of the pistol, all of which I would humbly submit to your Honour, or any other person you should think proper to appoint, and as it now fals on me to make proposals, I would first propose to make two, or three thousand pistols, at six dollars for each pistol with the alterations above proposed, or I would agree to make them for five dollars and Seventy five cents each agreeable to the pattern as it now is, and I will engage that each pistol with all its parts shall be equal to the patterne boath in workmanship and materials, and as for the terme of time to compleet them in I should be willing to conforme to circumstances; in case the pistols should not be wanted immediately I would propose from eighteen months to two years to make them in but in case they should be wanted sooner, I would be willing to enlarge the business so as to compleet them



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in a less terme of time, but would inform you that time is very essential in this business.

I would further engage to procure two good sureties for the fulfillment of this contract, and to indemnify the United States for all Money they should think proper to advance me for the carrying this business into effect.

I am Respectfully,  
Sir  
your most obedient  
Humble Serv<sup>t</sup>

SIMEON NORTH.

The HON. ROBERT SMITH ESQR  
*Secretary of the Navy.*

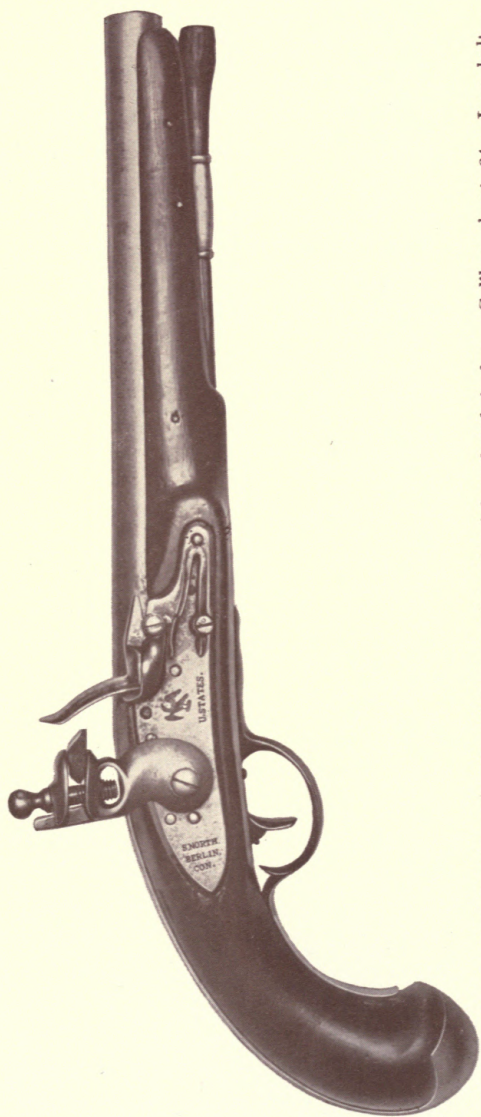
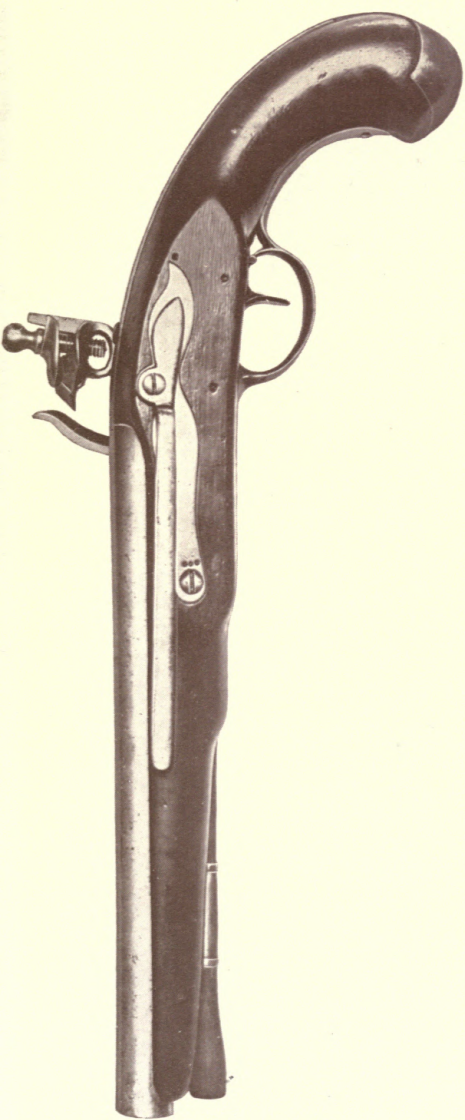
That Colonel North's proposals were agreeable to the government, is made clear by the next document unearthed from the files, which is the contract itself, signed on June 30, 1808, for the manufacture of 2,000 pistols, duly executed between Colonel North and Navy Agent Hull. This contract was in the following terms:

### THE CONTRACT OF JUNE 30, 1808

Contracts p. 345—AHE.

By this agreement made on the thirtieth day of June in the year eighteen hundred and eight, between Joseph Hull of Derby in Connecticut, agent within said state for the Department of the Navy of the United States & hereto authorized by the Hon-





Navy pistol; model of 1808. Length 16½ inches. Length of barrel 10¾ inches. Caliber about 64. Iron belt hook for use of sailors in boarding. Brass mountings.





## FIRST PISTOL CONTRACTS

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orable Robert Smith Secretary of the Navy, for and in behalf of the United States of America of the first part, & Simeon North of Berlin in Connecticut of the Second part, it is witnesseth,

That the said Simeon North for himself and his legal representatives contracts and engages to manufacture for the United States within the period of eighteen months from the first day of July in the present year, Two thousand pistols, to be delivered at Middletown in Connecticut to such person or persons as may be appointed to receive the same by the Secretary for the time being according to the following terms—

(1) The pistols are to be made and completed in a workmanlike manner, free from cracks and flaws, smooth bored and in goodness equal to a pattern-pistol to be furnished by said agent to the said Simeon North on his receipt and in fashion to the pattern pistol, except in the following respect viz., There is to be a strap of iron with the breech pin and the cap so as to support the rim of the stock, & pan is to be made of brass, instead of iron, and the lower part of the barrel is to be thicker than that of the pattern, but the caliber is to be the same.

(2) The pistols are to be proved at Burlin aforesaid by such person or persons as may be designated by the Secretary of the Navy, after notice by the party of the second part of there being five hundred barrels ready for proof and whenever the first hundred pistols shall be ready for proof and whenever the first hundred pistols shall be ready for inspection,

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the same after notice thereof by the party of the second part, shall be inspected at Berlin aforesaid by such persons as the Secretary of the Navy may designate, after which, there shall be ready for the next inspection not less than four hundred pistols, and the Subsequent Inspection shall be of parcels of not less than five hundred, unless the Secretary should otherwise direct, but if the party of the second part should desire to have less than five hundred barrels proved at any time, he may at his own expense offer the same for proof at the armory of the United States at Springfield, if the Secretary of the Navy should think proper to designate any person or persons for proving such smaller number at said armory, the charges for proving and inspecting the pistols and for boxes to contain the same when completed according to the Contract, are to be borne by the United States.

(3) The pistols when completed as aforesaid are to be delivered by the party of the second part to such person or persons as may be appointed on the part of the United States to receive the same at Middletown in Connecticut, and at such time within said period of eighteen months, and in such parcels of not less than four hundred, as may be most agreeable to the party of the second part.

(4) It is agreed by the party of the first part for and in behalf of the United States, that payment shall be made for the pistols so to be completed and delivered at the rate of eleven dollars and seventy five cents p<sup>r</sup> pair being five Dollars and eighty Seven



## FIRST PISTOL CONTRACTS

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Cents and a half for each pistol; which price shall be paid without delay for all the pistols which after due proof and inspection as aforesaid shall be delivered, in parcels of not less than four hundred at Middletown aforesaid, and receipted for by the person appointed for the purpose on the part of the United States.

In witness whereof the said agent for and in behalf of the United States, and the said Simeon North respectively have hereto subscribed their names and affixed their seals, the day and year first above written.

SIMEON NORTH  
JOSEPH HULL.

Subscribed, Sealed & delivered  
in the presence of  
SAML WM. DANA  
NATHL. STARR.

These documents reveal a characteristic of Colonel North to which we shall refer at length later on. He suggests two marked improvements upon the pattern pistol submitted as his model, "which would be much to the advantage of the United States," together with "some other small alterations in the different parts to the advantage of the pistol." The contract shows that both of his main suggestions were adopted by the government. The inventive intuition of Colonel North's mind, so clearly

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revealed in this letter, is still better shown in another, which he wrote in the following November, after he had been four months at work on the new contract:

SIMEON NORTH TO ROBERT SMITH

Miscellaneous Letters, 1808,

Vol. 6, p. 55—AHE.

BERLIN, CONNECTICUT

7th November, 1808

HON<sup>d</sup> SIR

To make my contract for pistols advantageous to the United States and to myself I must go to a great proportion of the expense before I deliver any pistols. I find that by confining a workman to one particular limb of the pistol untill he has made two thousand, I save at least one quarter of his labour, to what I should provided I finish<sup>d</sup> them by small quantities; and the work will be as much better as it is quicker made.—

To proceed in this way I must purchase the most of my Stock and Bestow a great proportion of the labour upon it before I can finish a pistol.

Under these circumstances, I have thought proper to address you on this subject, to know if you would be willing to make me an advance of Money sufficient to carry this business into effect, which I should accept as a very great favour. My letters of recommendation together with my Bond, I gave to Capt Joseph Hull Navy Agent & requested him to forward them to the Navy office; but for fear he has



## FIRST PISTOL CONTRACTS

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not, I have wrote to the Hon. Samuel W. Dana Esqr\* Member of Congress from Con. to assist me in this business who is acquainted with my circumstances as to property & with the circumstancies of My Bondsmen.—

I shall not put out any part of the work for a speculation; but have built an addition to my old factory, which makes it convenient for Manufacturing every part of the pistol under one roof, and shall superintend every part with the strictest attention myself. I have seventeen thousand screws & other parts of the pistols now forg<sup>d</sup> & many parts nearly finished & the business is going on brisk and lively.

I am Sir

with sentiments

of esteem your Humble Se<sup>vt</sup>

SIMEON NORTH.

HON. ROBERT SMITH, Esq<sup>r</sup>

*Secretary of the Navy.*

So far as the writers know, this letter is the earliest documentary evidence of the practical realization by an American manufacturer in any line, of the principle of standardization in the making of a large number of the identical article,—a principle now recognized as at the root of every successful manufacturing business. Colonel North discovered that by making all the individual parts of the 2,000 pistols at one

\*Samuel W. Dana was a representative in Congress from Connecticut from 1797 to 1810 and a Senator of the United States from 1810 to 1821. He was born in 1747 and died July 21, 1830. He graduated at Yale College in 1775.

## SIMEON NORTH

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time, and by the same workmen, he could not only save one quarter of the labor, but could, in still greater degree, improve the quality of his output. It is to be remembered that each particular "limb" of each pistol was laborously hammered out by hand, and that uniformity of product was thus much more difficult of attainment than is the case in these days when automatic machines turn out millions of separate parts each so exactly like every other that no eye can detect any difference. What actually happened in the case of Colonel North's pistols, constructed in accordance with this modern idea of his, was that the parts of pistols were turned out with much greater uniformity than under the old methods, and doubtless led to the invention of the machinery and tools that resulted in the contract of 1813 for pistols made interchangeable in all their parts. It was a discovery equally advantageous to the United States and to himself, and to all who have come after him.

That the idea of Colonel North appealed to the government officials with whom he was dealing is evident. There is no trace left of the correspondence which followed this letter; but in the next communication found is an acknowledgment of a remittance of \$4,000, evidently



## FIRST PISTOL CONTRACTS

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made in response to his request of November 7, for an advance of money sufficient to enable him to carry on the manufacture in the manner proposed,—a method which compelled him to purchase nearly all of the necessary stock and to “bestow a great proportion of the labor,” before he could finish a single pistol. The letter containing this acknowledgment was written after receipt of word from Captain Isaac Hull, to the effect that the government wished him to push his contract as rapidly as possible, as more pistols were needed than the contract called for. In this letter appeared the patriotic sentiment already quoted, referring to the threatening conditions in Europe, and “the unjustifiable, tyrannical and imperial orders” which had already begun to excite the indignant resentment of the American people, and pointed only too clearly to the outbreak of the war which was plainly in the mind of the national officials:

SIMEON NORTH TO ROBERT SMITH

Miscellaneous Letters 1809,

Vol. 2, p. 35—AHE

BERLIN, CON. 14th Feby 1809

DEAR SIR

I received a letter from Cap<sup>t</sup> Isaac Hull last week stating that the department wished me to push

## SIMEON NORTH

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my contract as fast as possible for they would want me to furnish more pistols than was contracted for. Sir I believe it the duty of every American citizen to unite and assist Government at this time in repelling the unjustifiable, tyrannical and imperial orders and decrees heaped upon us by the war powers of Europe, and you may depend that nothing shall be wanting on my part to support the just rights of the Union, that every branch of this business shall be crowded to the greatest extremities, wish you to inform me the extra number of pistols you want me to furnish, & I will do all in my power to accommodate you. I shall have the whole of my barrels made for this contract within eight or ten weeks, & should be glad to have six or eight hundred of them proved in a short time,—wish you to inform me who I shall call on for that purpose, when ready.

My factory is convenient to employ forty or fifty Armors, and I now stand ready to fill it with workmen if Government should require it.

Please to accept my sincere acknowledgements for the remittance of four thousand dollars which you have been pleased to oblige me with.

I am, sir,

with the greatest respect

your most Obedient

Humble Serv<sup>t</sup>

SIMEON NORTH.

HON. ROBERT SMITH, Esq.

The response of the Secretary was prompt and satisfactory:



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ROBERT SMITH TO SIMEON NORTH

General Letters—9

p. 352 1 Aug. 1807–13 May 1809.

AHE

NAVY DEPAR<sup>T</sup>

20 Feby. 1809.

MR. SIMEON NORTH

Berlin, C<sup>t</sup>

Your letter of the 12<sup>th</sup> ins<sup>t</sup> has been received.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> ins<sup>t</sup> I wrote to the Navy Agent, Mr. Hull, and gave him the requisite instructions to prove your Pistols—When they shall be proved & I shall receive evidence of their being well made, I will then give you a further Contract.

Cap<sup>t</sup> Isaac Hull informed me, that he had written to you, & given you directions to brown the barrels and locks.—This you will do, & as the process is extremely simple and the materials will cost scarcely anything, I hope you will brown them without making any additional charge.

R<sup>t</sup>. SMITH.

A discrepancy in dates occurs in this correspondence. The above letter was evidently a reply to Colonel North's letter of February 14, and not the 12<sup>th</sup>.

Some time appears to have elapsed after this correspondence, before the promise of the Secretary for an additional contract was fulfilled. The delay was doubtless due to the testing and inspection of the arms. As a result of that in-



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spection, Colonel North's pistols were "much approved," and an order given for 500 additional pair, in the following letter:

PAUL HAMILTON TO COLONEL NORTH

Contracts p. 433—AHE.

NAVY DEPAR<sup>T</sup>  
Dec<sup>r</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> 1810.

MAJOR SIMEON NORTH  
Berlin,  
Connecticut.

The pistols which you have made for this Department being much approved, in addition to your present contract you will please make five hundred pair more,\* as soon as you can; for which you will be allowed as for those you have made, being of equal quality and same size Twelve Dollars a pair.

PAUL HAMILTON.

The bond given in connection with this extension of the contract was as follows:

### BOND

Contracts No. 2—p. 277  
AHE.

Know all men by these presents that we Simeon North of Berlin County of Hartford & State of Connecticut as principal and Josiah Savage of Middletown County of Middlesex and State aforesaid as

\*Custom decreed that pistols should be made and carried in pairs, so that if the first shot missed there was still one shot left. *Charles Winthrop Sawyer.*

## FIRST PISTOL CONTRACTS

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surety are holden & firmly bound to the United States of America in the sum of Seven thousand dollars to be paid to the said United States for which payment well & truly to be made, we the said Simeon North and Josiah Savage, obligate ourselves, our heirs, executors & administrators, jointly and severally, by these presents, dated at Middletown aforesaid this 14th day of January, one thousand eight hundred & eleven—

The condition of the above obligation, is such that whereas on the fourth day of December 1810 the said Simeon North contracted with the Secretary of the Navy to manufacture for the United States, five hundred pair of Pistols, in addition to his present contract, at twelve dollars per pair being of equal quality & same size of those heretofore made—and now if the said Simeon North shall well & truly make & complete said Pistols agreeable to the directions of the Secretary of the Navy, bearing date of December 4th 1810 and deliver the same within a reasonable time then the preceding obligation shall be void, otherwise, the same shall be valid & remain in full force

SIMEON NORTH [SEAL]

JOSIAH SAVAGE [SEAL]

Subscribed sealed &  
delivered in presence of

JESSE SAVAGE

DANIEL K. HOWELL

In 1808, the Congress passed an act providing for the arming of the militia, and the greater part of the so-called contract arms of that period



## SIMEON NORTH

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were purchased under its provisions. The statement has frequently been made that certain manufacturers were unduly favored under this law. It is so wholly erroneous, that it is worth while to state the facts, as shown in the official records,—which sundry historians do not appear to have taken the trouble to examine. The act itself, approved April 23, 1808, was as follows:

*An Act making provision for arming and equipping the whole body of the militia of the United States.*

That the annual sum of two hundred thousand dollars be, and the same hereby is appropriated for the purpose of providing arms and military equipment for the whole body of the militia of the United States, either by purchase or manufacture, by and on account of the United States.

Sec. 2.—That the President of the United States be, and he hereby is, authorized to purchase sites for, and erect, such additional arsenals and manufactories of arms as he may deem expedient, under the limitations and restrictions now provided by law: *Provided, also*, that so much of any law as restricts the number of workmen in the armories of the United States to one hundred men, be repealed.

Sec. 3.—That all the arms procured in virtue of this act shall be transmitted to the several states composing this Union, and Territories thereof, to each State and Territory, respectively, in proportion to the number of effective militia in each State and Territory, and by each State and Territory to be distributed to the militia in such State and Territory,

## FIRST PISTOL CONTRACTS

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under such rules and regulations as shall be by law prescribed by the legislature of each State and Territory.

This act remained in force until 1887, when the annual appropriation was doubled.

It has been stated that the act required the annual payment of the appropriation of \$200,000 to six private armories that were established in that year,—those of Asa Waters, Simeon North, Nathan Starr, Eli Whitney, Henry Deringer and Lemuel Pomeroy. We have been unable to discover the slightest evidence that any such arrangement ever existed, and the facts connected with the awarding of contracts under the act do not warrant the supposition that such was the case, as all through the Ordnance Reports other names constantly appear as contractors. The following extract from an article by Mr. George C. Maynard of the National Museum, entitled "Private Gun Factories," published in January, 1904, shows that there were no favored contractors:

While the government was urgently pressing the business of organizing and equipping its own factories and getting them at work turning out arms with all possible expedition, it still appealed to private parties to aid in meeting the demands for the large number of guns required for the army.



## SIMEON NORTH

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In 1808 five-year contracts were made with private gunmakers for from 2,500 to 10,000 muskets each and advances of from about 50 cents to \$2 per musket were paid to them. The names of these contractors and the numbers of arms delivered by them up to October 7, 1812, were:

W. & I. I. Henry, Pennsylvania.....	4,246
Goetz & Westphall, Pennsylvania.....	1,019
John Miles, New Jersey.....	2,407
Winner, Nippes & Co., Pennsylvania.....	3,290
Waters & Whittemore, Massachusetts.....	3,000
Ethan Stillman, Connecticut.....	825
Daniel Gilbert, Massachusetts.....	875
French, Blake & Kinsley, Massachusetts.....	2,175
I. & C. C. Barstow, New Hampshire.....	1,625
Wheeler & Morrison, Virginia.....	125
Oliver Bidwell, Connecticut.....	750
O. & E. Evans, Pennsylvania.....	1,960
Stephen Jenks & Sons, Rhode Island.....	2,300
R. & C. Leonard, Massachusetts.....	2,125
A. & P. Bartlett, Massachusetts.....	1,500
Rufus Perkins, Massachusetts.....	200
I. I. & N. Brooke, Pennsylvania.....	1,257
W. & H. Shannon, Pennsylvania.....	1,101
Sweet, Jenks & Son, Rhode Island.....	250

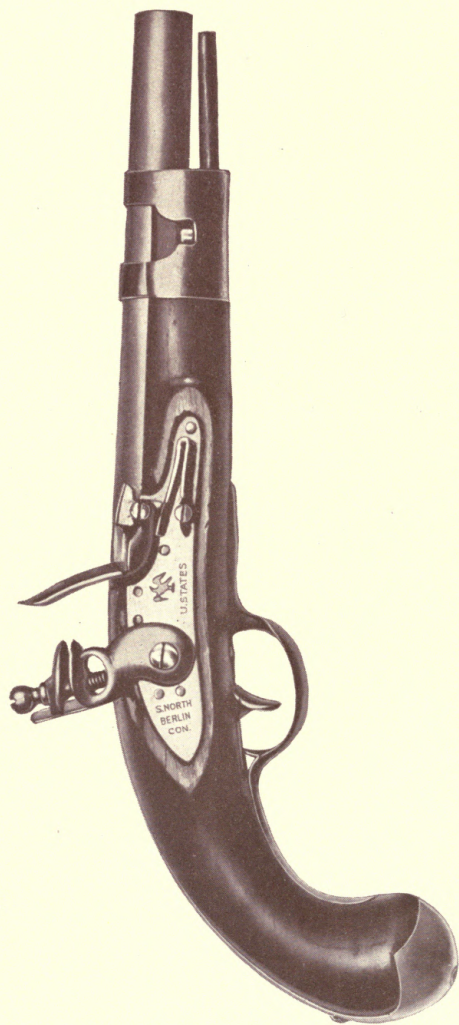
The contract with the last named firm was made November 13, 1810.

Among other private manufacturers there have been Lewis Ghriskey, Daniel Henkel, Elias Earle, M. T. Wickham, Lemuel Pomeroy, Asa Waters, Simeon North, Nathan Starr and Henry Derringer.\*

\**The Sporting Goods Dealer*, January, 1904.







Horse Pistol; model of 1810. Length 15 inches. Length of barrel  $8\frac{5}{8}$  inches. Caliber,  $54.69$ -

## FIRST PISTOL CONTRACTS

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Not one of those named as having been established as private armories appears among the nineteen who were awarded contracts in 1808, with the possible exception of Asa Waters, who may have been of the firm of Waters & Whitmore. Eli Whitney was still working on his contract of 1798. Simeon North, on June 30, 1808, signed a contract with the Navy Department for 2,000 boarding pistols.

Simeon North's first contract under the act of 1808 for horse pistols was made with Tench Coxe, in 1810. It is not known how many pistols were ordered, as the contract cannot be located, but the letter of Captain Morton, (page 13) stating that at the time of the signing of the 1813 contract, he still owed 2,400 pistols on account of this contract, is sufficient evidence of its existence. Further evidence is found in the day book of Reuben North, in which is an entry under date of July, 1812, stating that work had been commenced on 2,000 horse pistols.

Positive knowledge is lacking regarding the model of the pistols furnished under this contract, but it is believed that they were of the model shown opposite page 13, as this pistol certainly anti-dates the 1813 model, having

[ 75 ]

## ERRATA

Page 75, second paragraph, sixth line, for (page 13) read (page 117). Third paragraph, the fourth line should read "model shown on the opposite page," not "page 13."



## SIMEON NORTH

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been made at Berlin, and the butt caps being the same shape as that of the 1799 model, while in the 1813 and subsequent models, all pistols were stamped "Middletown," and the butt caps were straight across the butt of the stock. This model cannot be accounted for under any other contract that has been located. As stated on page 13 the contract was probably for at least 5,000 pistols. The earliest contracts under the act of 1808, that can be located with the other five men referred to, are as follows:

Eli Whitney, July 18, 1812.....	15,000 muskets,
Nathan Starr, Jan. 11, 1813.....	10,000 swords,
H. Derringer, Mch. 17, 1814.....	2,000 rifles,
Lemuel Pomeroy, June 20, 1816.....	5,000 muskets,
Asa Waters, Aug. 13, 1816.....	5,000 muskets.

As late as 1821 the Ordnance Reports give the names of Robert Johnson, Martin T. Wickham, Alex. McRae and Adam Caruth, as still owing guns contracted for under the act. In 1829, nine manufacturers were engaged on contracts, and in 1841 seven manufacturers were furnishing 13,100 stands of small arms per annum, consisting of 7,100 guns and 6,000 pistols. The names of the makers are not given, but they are believed to have been Starr, North,

## FIRST PISTOL CONTRACTS

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Whitney, Waters, Pomeroy, Derringer and Johnson. It is therefore quite certain, that while all the parties named as favored makers enjoyed contracts under the act of 1808, and continued longer in the business than other contractors, they possessed no monopoly of the business.

The following extract from a communication from Colonel Bomford to the Secretary of War, January 7, 1829, states clearly the reason for the continued renewal of contracts with these men:

The practice of renewing contracts with those who had faithfully fulfilled their previous engagements has been continued to the present time, and no doubt of its propriety is entertained. The steady support and patronage thus given by the government to those contractors whose skill, perseverance and capital saved them from an early failure, has resulted in the firm establishment of several valuable manufactories of arms, and preserved to the country establishments and means which are intimately connected with its defence and security. These manufactories are now so well established, and the number of well instructed artisans so great, that the annual product of arms could be doubled in a short time should the exigencies of the country require it.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE CONTRACT OF 1813—THE FIRST APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF INTERCHANGEABLE PARTS

**I**T IS stated in the history of Middlesex County, Connecticut, that shortly after the declaration of war on June 18, 1812, the Secretary of War, then William Eustis, of Massachusetts, made a visit to Middletown, expressly for the purpose of inspecting the factory of Colonel North, then located in Berlin six miles distant; and that during this visit he urged the armorer to increase his plant, promising him large contracts for pistols if he would do so, promises which were well justified, in view of the war, and the fact that Colonel North was at the time the only manufacturer in the United States equipped and qualified to supply this special and imperative need of the government.

The chief difficulty in the way of carrying out the secretary's plans was the financial one. While Colonel North was in comfortable circumstances and enjoyed the best of credit, the

## INTERCHANGEABLE PARTS

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bankers were reluctant to discount the paper of a manufacturer engaged in government work, at a time when the country was involved in a war which many felt was bound to result disastrously, and to which a large body of the people, particularly in New England and in the seaport towns, were bitterly opposed. There was especial difficulty in obtaining loans at such a time, for the purpose of extending a plant devoted to the manufacture of arms.

In this emergency, a friend of Colonel North's, Samuel Russell, a wealthy citizen of Middletown, came to his aid and agreed to endorse his notes. He was thus enabled to make the necessary loan, and at once began preparations for extensive additions to his plant, both in buildings and machinery. At the same time he submitted a new model of pistol to the War Department, which he agreed to manufacture with interchangeable parts. Almost immediately, on April 16, 1813, he was awarded a contract for 20,000 pistols, by far the largest he had yet received, and the largest yet made by the government for this small arm. The pistol manufactured under this contract is the arm known as the 1817, or double band pistol. This contract is reproduced in full below; it is

## SIMEON NORTH

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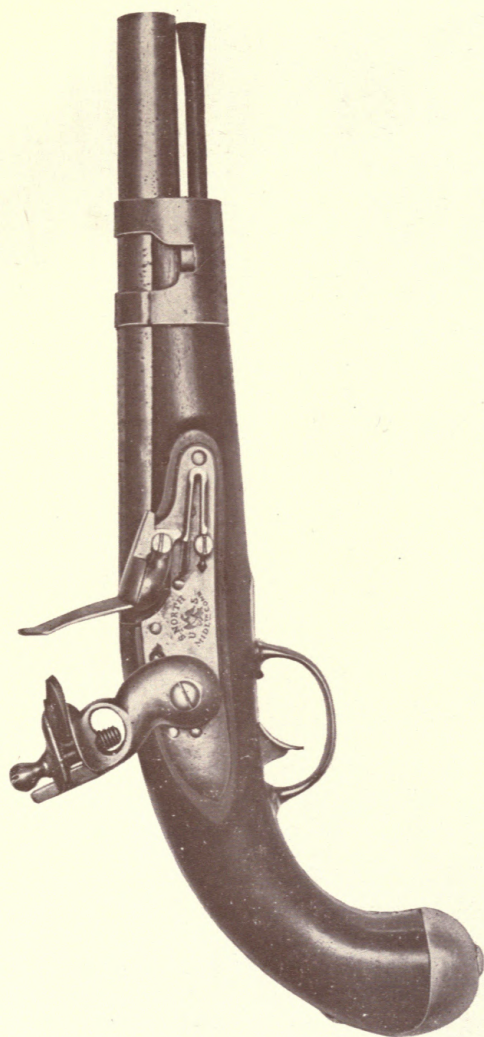
particularly interesting in view of its requirement that "the component parts of pistols are to correspond so exactly that any limb or part of one pistol may be fitted to any other pistol of the 20,000," as recommended by Colonel North:

CONTRACT OF APRIL 16, 1813

*KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS,*

That it is hereby mutually agreed by, and between the United States,—by Callender Irvine, Commissary General, and Simeon North of Berlin Connt., that the said Simeon North, shall and will manufacture, and deliver within five years from the date hereof, Twenty thousand Pistols, of the size, dimensions and workmanship to the pattern pistol exhibited, with the following exceptions Viz—"Hammer pin too large & enters crooked—To be made the same size of the small pins of the locks—The threads on the small lock pins to be encreased about one size—The thread in cock defective, and cock pin & jaw too loose—The sear spring pin hole in plate to be put the same distance from the axletree hole as the sear pin hole is—The Pistols are to be stocked with wood cut from the butt or root of the tree having the natural turn,"—It is agreed that the said Simeon North shall furnish to every hundred pistols, the following named articles & component parts of Pistols, that is to say; Ten bullet screws—Ten screw drivers—Fifteen main springs & cock pins—Ten hammer springs, sear springs, Rammers, Hammers &





Horse pistol; model of 1813. Length  $15\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Length of barrel 9 inches. Caliber, 69. Iron mountings.



## INTERCHANGEABLE PARTS

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setts side pins—Five Cocks, Tumblers, Sears, Pans, Jaws, Bridles,—Band springs, Butt screws, Triggers, Setts small lock pins & setts breech pins.—Each pistol not to exceed  $3\frac{1}{2}$  pounds in weight, and are to have on each one of them the letters U. S. & an Eagle stamped on the plate of the lock, also, the name & place of residence of the manufacturer, the component parts of pistols, are to correspond so exactly that any limb or part of one Pistol, may be fitted to any other Pistol of the Twenty thousand; One thousand pistols with the extra parts or limbs complete to be delivered in the first year, four thousand in the second year & five thousand in each succeeding year until the whole shall have been completed; The Pistols are to be delivered at Norwich Connt. or at New York, if it should be required, after the danger of Capture by the enemy shall have ceased.

It is further agreed, that the price of the said Pistol—with the extra parts complete, is and shall be Seven Dollars each, money of the United States, payable to the amount of each and every parcel delivered, on demand after strict & regular inspection, by a person or persons to be appointed for that purpose by the United States, and after such inspector shall certify that the said pistols with their extra parts—complete, have been so by him inspected & passed agreeably to Contract. An advance of Twenty thousand Dollars to be made to the said Simeon North, on his giving bonds, with sufficient sureties for the faithful execution of the Contract.

A deduction of one dollar from the price of each Pistol delivered, is to be made, till the whole advance



## SIMEON NORTH

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money is accounted for. It is expressly conditioned, that no member of Congress is or shall be admitted to any share or part of this contract or agreement or to any benefit to arise thereupon.

Witness the hand of the said Callender Irvine Commissary General, and the hand & seal of the said Simeon North this Sixteenth day of April 1813.

Sealed & delivered in presence of	The Pistols are to be proven & inspected, and the Boxes furnished for their transportation to be, at the expense of the United States.
E. J. B. SABROUSSE	

SIMEON NORTH [SEAL]

CALLENDER IRVINE

*Commy Genl* [SEAL]

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The contract of 1813 marked the beginning of a revolution in the manufacture of firearms. It was the first government contract in which the contractor stipulated and agreed to produce arms interchangeable in their parts. The fact that he was ready to enter into a contract to furnish 20,000 pistols embodying this principle, makes it evident that Colonel North had already evolved the principle, in the manufacture of pistols under prior contracts.

The honor of first employing the system of interchangeable parts in the manufacture of

## INTERCHANGEABLE PARTS

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arms has been claimed for several other armorers. The traditions handed down in the North family, relating to Colonel North's achievements in this direction, undoubtedly exist in the families of other arms manufacturers of his generation. That he had actually made progress in this direction as early as 1808, is evident from his letter of November 7 of that year, already quoted, in which he stated that "by confining a workman to one particular limb of the pistol until he has made 2,000, I save at least one quarter of the labor."\*

That several manufacturers of arms were doing more or less along the line of standardization of parts, is undoubtedly true. This was in great measure forced upon them, as there were few skilled gun-smiths to be had, and they were obliged to resort to various expedients in

\*It is claimed that the principle of interchangeable parts was first applied by Sir Samuel Bentham toward the end of the last century, in wood working machinery, and to some extent in the metal working machinery of England. Bentham "classed the several operations that have place in the working of materials of every description according to the nature of the operations themselves," and not according to the trades or handicrafts for which they are used. In regard to wood particularly, he contrived machines for performing most of these operations, whereby the need of skill and dexterity in the working man was dispensed with, and the machines were capable of being worked by steam or other power. —*Bishop's History of Manufactures*. Vol. I, Page 517.

## SIMEON NORTH

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producing a satisfactory product.\* This naturally resulted in the turning of their Yankee ingenuity to the invention of machinery and tools to take the place of men, the result being that the parts were more nearly uniform than when made entirely by hand. It is a family tradition that the filing jig was invented by Simeon North's son Selah, and that the first milling machine was made and used in his factory. In confirmation of this tradition, we have the testimony of one who worked in Colonel North's factory from boyhood until the business was discontinued. Chauncey Skinner learned his trade in the North factory, and when an old man, in 1870, he told a great-grandson of Colonel North, that Selah invented the filing jig, and that the milling machine was developed shortly afterwards. Various other tools were

\* A curious illustration of the truth of the statement regarding the scarcity of skilled workmen, and of the difficulties which troubled the armorers in consequence, is found in Section 2 of "An Act for the regulation of public arsenals and magazines," which was approved May 7, 1800:

"Sec. 2.—That if any person shall procure or entice any artificer or workman retained or employed in any arsenal or armory of the United States, to depart from the same during the continuance of his engagement, or avoid or break his contract with the United States, or who, after due notice of the engagement of any such workman or armorer in any arsenal or armory, shall during the continuance of such engagement, retain, hire or in anywise employ, harbor, or conceal such artificer or workman, the person so offending shall,



## INTERCHANGEABLE PARTS

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there devised for simplifying and facilitating the work. The invention of the machines and tools originally undertaken for the purpose of overcoming the difficulty in obtaining skilled mechanics, was working naturally towards the duplication of parts.

That a complete system of duplication was first devised and carried into actual practice in Colonel North's establishment, is evident from the fact that the contract of April 16, 1813, was the first made with any manufacturer in which uniformity of parts was specified.

The family tradition is that Colonel North visited Washington and submitted several sample

upon conviction, be fined, at the discretion of the court, not exceeding fifty dollars, or be imprisoned for a term not exceeding three months."

A letter of Colonel Wadsworth, dated January 17, 1817, throws a further interesting light upon the situation as to skilled artisans at that time. The following is an extract from this letter:

Contracts with individuals for procuring firearms of different descriptions are now in operation, and they might be considerably extended were there not serious objections to that method. Extensive contracts with individuals produce a competition to obtain workmen, which recoils with great effect upon the national armories and tends to seduce from them the best hands. High wages makes the business unprofitable to the contractors, and ultimately in many instances has occasioned their ruin. A great capital is required for commencing the business, and the returns are slow. The contractor should be a man of great capacity, ingenuity and experience. Many men, tempted by the encouragements of the Government aiding them with advances of money, have totally failed and been reduced to abject poverty or seriously injured in their circumstances.

## SIMEON NORTH

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pistols made in duplicate, and agreed to make any number embodying this principle. The Ordnance office was so pleased with his exhibit that he was at once awarded the contract for 20,000 pistols. This story is confirmed by the contract itself, for "20,000 pistols of the size, dimensions and workmanship to the pattern pistol exhibited."

The successful application of the idea of interchangeable parts is the chief claim of Colonel North to the honorable position among the pioneer manufacturers of the United States which this Memoir awards him. In this work he was ably assisted by his sons Reuben, Alvin and Selah, all of whom learned the business in their father's factory, and were expert mechanics. Others whose names have been lost sight of, rendered efficient service in carrying out his ideas. All those who were actively engaged in the work have passed away; but others still living distinctly recall hearing their fathers and grandfathers talk of the struggles and triumphs of those early days. As already intimated, title to the credit of first applying this development in manufacture has been claimed in behalf of several of his contemporaries; but the credit of first achieving complete success is certainly due to Colonel North.



## INTERCHANGEABLE PARTS

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To successfully dispute this claim, it is necessary to produce some documentary evidence which ante-dates Colonel North's contract of April 16, 1813, with the United States government. Family traditions are not very satisfactory evidence as a rule, and they possess no significance in the face of this official record. It is a fact that the descendants of other manufacturers claim it for their forebears: and there are still left some memories of bitternesses engendered by claims that a distinction belonging to one was appropriated by others. The only positive claim to this distinction which has heretofore found its way into permanent literature so far as we know, is made in behalf of Eli Whitney, the inventor of the cotton gin, by his biographer. Denison Olmstead, Professor of Natural Philosophy and History in Yale College. Eli Whitney was one of the ablest men, and one of the most ingenious and successful mechanics our country has produced; that he grasped and applied the principle of interchangeable parts, and invented machines for carrying it into effect, is neither doubted nor disputed. Professor Olmstead's memoir, separately printed in 1846, was first published in *The American Journal of Science* in 1832, ten years after Mr.



## SIMEON NORTH

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Whitney's death. His statement that Mr. Whitney was the first American to apply the principle in the manufacture of arms has hitherto remained undisputed.

We venture to dispute it here, on the testimony of the official documents on record in the War and Navy Departments, and reproduced in this Memoir. Mr. Whitney's first contract for the manufacture of 10,000 muskets, dated January 14, 1798, cannot be found in the files of the War or Navy Departments, although an exhaustive search has been made for it. It was doubtless destroyed with nearly all the other War Department records when the war office was burned on November 12, 1800, or again on August 25, 1814, as previously stated. Whether or not a copy of this contract exists in any private hands, we are unable to say. That it contained no mention of the standardization or duplication of parts, nor any remote reference to it, we venture to assert; for in his second contract, dated July 18, 1812, there is no specification of this kind nor any reference to the subject. Certainly if such a requirement had been included in his first contract, it would have been carried forward into the second. Indeed, it seems impossible that Mr. Whitney, at the time

## INTERCHANGEABLE PARTS

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when he made his first contract, and when he had had no experience in manufacturing arms, and had little knowledge of the difficulties which other manufacturers were endeavoring to overcome, could then have had the thought in his mind.

Four months after the signing of his contract of June 30, 1808, Colonel North, in his letter of November 7, 1808 already quoted, had made the first hint of this possibility in his statement that "by confining a workman to one particular limb of the pistol until he has made two thousand, I save at least one quarter of his labor to what I should, provided I finish them by small quantities, and the work will be as much better as it is quicker made"; and in his contract of 1813, the specific agreement is made that "the component parts of pistols, are to correspond so exactly that any limb or part of one pistol, may be fitted to any other Pistol of the Twenty Thousand." Similar provisions became common in subsequent contracts; but this contract is the first government contract in existence, so far as our researches can determine, in which the requirement for uniformity of parts is embodied, or hinted at.

As stated by Bishop in his *History of American Manufactures* (see footnote p. 83) the invention

## SIMEON NORTH

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of interchangeable parts is commonly ascribed to Sir Samuel Bentham, of England, towards the latter part of the eighteenth century, and was by him applied in wood working and metal working. We do not question this statement. The Bentham invention is assigned to the end of the eighteenth century, only a few years prior to Colonel North's contract of 1813. It is a familiar fact of history that the policy of Great Britain towards her American Colonies was one systematically designed and rigidly enforced to exclude the latter from all knowledge of the improvements in manufacturing machinery which were rapidly developing in the mother country just prior to the American Revolution. Stringent laws were enacted, forbidding the exportation of machinery or models of machinery; and these laws were enforced with a degree of success which rarely attends such restrictive legislation. During the years which preceded and followed the Revolution, our people were so engrossed in the struggle for political independence and the development of their experiment in self-government, that they were compelled to neglect many material considerations. When Tench Coxe, at the close of the Revolution, turned his prophetic eye and his practical instinct to the



## INTERCHANGEABLE PARTS

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manufacturing development of his country, he was thwarted in his efforts by the impossibility of obtaining the machinery with which to start the enterprises he had in mind. It may well be, therefore, that no knowledge of Sir Samuel Bentham's invention existed in the United States, at the time when Colonel North devised and worked out the principle of interchangeable parts; in fact that he reinvented the system, as an original inspiration. We do not assert it, for in the nature of things there can be no proof of it. He applied and developed it in the manufacture of pistols; he subsequently carried it to even greater perfection in the manufacture of guns; and there exists no evidence we have been able to discover, that the system or method had been earlier applied in any other branch of manufacturing in the United States, in every branch of which it is now so universally applied that it seems a simple and commonplace thing. But it was long after Colonel North's day that this universal application came into effect. He was the pioneer; and so it happens that he rendered a very signal service in the development of American manufactures, of which its beneficiaries have remained in ignorance.

## CHAPTER V

### THE BUILDING OF THE MIDDLETOWN FACTORY, AND AN UNPLEASANT EPISODE

**I**MMEDIATELY upon returning from Washington to Berlin with this contract, Colonel North purchased fifty acres of land located on Mattabesett or West River, with the privilege of flowing, at Staddle Hill, in Middletown, about a mile and a half southwest of Middletown Center. The water power at Berlin was not sufficient to take care of a factory as large as it was now necessary to operate. Here he proceeded to build a large dam, and to erect a three story brick factory, together with several outbuildings, planned along the best lines of the manufacturing buildings of those times.

He states in a letter (see p. 122) that this factory with its machinery and tools, represented an investment of one hundred thousand dollars. There were few larger manufacturing investments in those days, either in New England or elsewhere in the country.



## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

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When the new factory was completed and equipped, Colonel North turned over the Berlin shop to his eldest son Reuben, who had been long associated with him in the business there, and who continued to run it, in close affiliation with the Middletown factory, making forgings for the pistols manufactured in the new factory. Reuben North carried on the Berlin shop as superintendent until 1843, when, his health failing, he retired, and the factory was closed. It was destroyed by a flood in 1857, which swept away the dam on Spruce brook at the same time. Hardly a trace of this primitive factory has been visible for many years, and the stream has shrunk to such meager dimensions that it is difficult for the imagination to realize the large and important business which was so successfully conducted with the aid of its flow, by father and son, for half a century.

In the summer of 1813, and during the erection of his Middletown factory, Colonel North removed his residence from Berlin to that city. He purchased the interest of the heirs in the homestead of the father of his second wife, the Rev. Enoch Huntington, on High Street, and this homestead continued his residence for the remainder of his life. Some years after his



## SIMEON NORTH

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death, the house was removed or torn down, and on its site was erected the house now occupied by the President of Wesleyan University. The Staddle Hill pistol factory was on the site of the present Rock Fall Woolen Company, which still uses several of the buildings erected by Colonel North.

Colonel North deeded his Berlin farm of  $66\frac{1}{2}$  acres to Reuben, on March 10, 1814, and here the latter continued to live until his death on April 4, 1853, at the age of sixty-seven. Colonel North, after his removal, frequently visited the Berlin shop of which Reuben remained the superintendent, driving the six miles in a carriage with a white top, which tradition declares to have been the first carriage ever owned in Berlin.

The delays and difficulties attending the erection and equipment of his new factory were far greater than Colonel North had contemplated.

This chapter will have to deal with some of these difficulties, and others with the government officials which grew indirectly out of them. The contract of 1813 was by far the largest which Colonel North had yet undertaken, and his agreement to make each and every part of the 20,000 pistols exactly correspond with its

## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

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fellow in every pistol, must have involved, at the outset, many problems which required time and patience to work out. By the terms of the contract, all of the 20,000 pistols were to be completed and delivered within five years from its date. During the first two years of this period, the progress made was slow, only 1,150 pistols having been delivered on June 22, 1815. This is shown by the following memorandum attached to the copy of the contract on file in the War Department:

*Received and paid for on the within contracts:*

1813 Oct. 29..	136	pairs of Pistols	} paid for
1814 Mar. 25..	42	" " "	
" June 22..	100	" " "	} These pistols are not paid for. The payment was stopped on a/c of heavy advances made Mr North. The a/c also embraced 1,070 pr Minn at \$1. pr. pr. The price to be allowed for the Pistols is
" Sept. 26..	25	" " "	
1815 June 22..	75	" " "	
" " 7..	200	" " "	
	578 pr. or 1,150	Pistols	} 12 <sup>87½</sup> / <sub>100</sub> dols. pr. pair

## SIMEON NORTH

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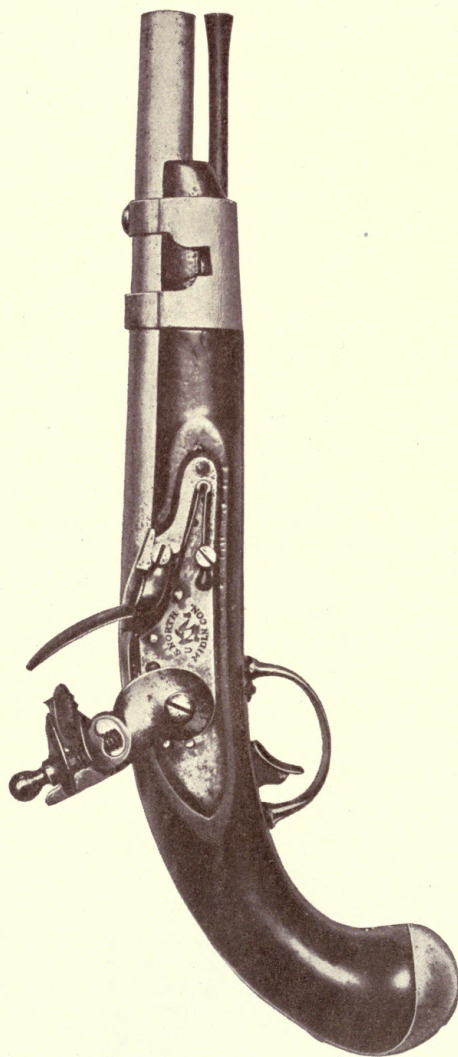
At the time when the contract of 1813 was entered upon, Colonel North still owed the government 2,400 pistols on account of a former contract. The slow progress on the new contract was doubtless due to the necessity of completing this other work, as well as to the causes already indicated.

The memorandum quoted above is the first official record we have of the fact that the government had stopped payments upon Colonel North's pistols delivered, "on account of heavy advances made." This appears to have occurred in June, 1814, and the suspension of payments was still in effect on June 22, 1815, there being at that date in the possession of the government 800 pistols for which it had not paid. The reasons for this action appear in the very full correspondence reproduced in the following pages.

In the meanwhile, the government had become dissatisfied with the model stipulated in the contract, and in compliance with the request of the authorities Colonel North made the long and tedious trip to Washington, for the purpose of consultation over a new model. As a result of this consultation, he submitted a new proposition, in conformity with the wishes







Horse pistol; model of 1813, as modified in 1816. Length  $15\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Length of barrel 9 inches. Caliber, 54.  
Sight on band. Iron mountings.



## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

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of the government. This was in writing as follows:

COLONEL NORTH TO THE CHIEF OF ORDNANCE

WASHINGTON Monday 8 Jan'y 1816.

SIR

In the Conversation which I had the Honor to have with you, at the Ordnance office, on Friday last, you expressed an opinion that it might be for the benefit of the public service, to have some alteration made in relation to the Contract for twenty thousand pistols, which the Commissary General and myself had agreed on, the 16th of April 1813.

I understood the following alterations, in substance, to be proposed on behalf of the Public.

- 1st. The Caleber of the Barrel for the Pistols to be reduced to that of the Rifle, kept at the Ordnance office.
- 2nd. The Barrel & Strap or tongue of the breech, together with the Iron mounting of the Pistols to be browned.
- 3rd. A sight to be put on the band of the Pistols.
- 4th. The Locks of the Pistols to be made so uniformly alike, that they may be fitted to any of the 20,000 Pistols, and to be case hardened, & so delivered without polishing.

As the proposed alteration may require considerable time, and Expense, beyond what was required in the before mentioned Contract, of the 16th of April 1813. And having reflected on the subject, and according to your desire, have now to state the terms on which I will agree to make the proposed alterations.



## SIMEON NORTH

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- 1st. The Contract to be extended One year.
- 2nd. One dollar to be added to the price of each Pistol.
- 3rd. The liberty of delivering any part of the aforesaid Pistols in such quantities, and at such times, as may be found convenient, for the beneficial arrangement of the business—but within the time of the Contract as extended.
- 4th. An advance of twenty five thousand Dollars towards the Contract, and upon the same conditions as the \$20,000 advanced by the Commissary General.

[Signed] SIMEON NORTH

Attached to this document in the files of the War Department are the following endorsements:

Washington May 9th 1816

The preceding alterations have been sanctioned by Col. Wadsworth, and meet my approbation.

[Signed] G. BOMFORD.

*Lieut. Col. of Ordnance*

A true copy of the duplicate, Original deposited in this office. March 3rd 1817.

[Signed] WM. LEE

*Account. War Departmt.*

The above is a true Copy of the terms of Agreement (now in my hands) as copied & certified.

[Signed] SIMEON NORTH

Middletown, Conn. Novem. 15 1817

The proposition of Colonel North was thus under consideration from January 8, 1816, to May 9 of that year, on which date it was accepted.

## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

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During all this period, as we have seen, he was refused the money already owed him.

The fault found with the pistol model is explained in a letter of Colonel Decius Wadsworth, of the Ordnance Bureau, to the Secretary of War, on June 10, 1815, in regard to the desirability of uniform models in arms, from which we quote:

I shall conclude what I have to observe at present on this subject by remarking on the expediency of having established models for the manufacture of Swords, Pistols, etc. The caliber of the pistols, for greater simplicity, might be the same as that of the rifle. It is essentially wrong in my opinion to give a pistol the caliber of a musket, which I am informed has been done in some of those made for the United States service. The pattern of the pistol made at Harpers Ferry I approve.

Colonel North was in no sense responsible for any defect in the pistol, as the model had been submitted to the Ordnance officers, and by them approved. Nor had he any knowledge that a change of the caliber to that of the rifle was desired, or would be accepted.

The alteration in the lock referred to the small parts, which had evidently not been included in the original contract. The advance of \$25,000 which Colonel North asked and received, was in addition to the advance of \$20,000 already



## SIMEON NORTH

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received under the original contract, and already entirely consumed, beyond doubt, in meeting the loans with which he had purchased the Middletown property and erected the new factory. The delays and suspended payments had made a heavy strain upon his financial resources; and had not the government again come to his assistance, he must have failed in an undertaking exceptionally large and difficult for those days. Indeed most of the men of his day and generation who went into this complicated and technical work for the government, were compelled to abandon it for lack of the necessary capital and skill.

The family traditions are replete with stories of the indomitable will and cheerful optimism with which Colonel North faced these trials as they arose, and the resolute tenacity with which he set himself to conquer them.

In the carrying out of his plans for the complete standardization of parts, he was subjected to the ridicule of his neighbors, and those who should have been his friends. His credit was assailed, and in many ways he was made to feel the unfriendly and sceptical attitude of his townsmen. Through it all he kept steadily on in his great work, supported by the staunch



## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

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friendship of a few such men as Samuel Russell, Senator Dana and Nathan Starr and his son, the celebrated sword makers, whose factory was located just below that of Colonel North, on the same stream. The following letter written to Nathan Starr, Jr., from New York, sheds some light upon the strained relations existing between Colonel North and his neighbors at this time, when he most needed their support and encouragement:

COLONEL NORTH TO NATHAN STARR, JR.

New York 15th May 1816

DEAR SIR

Your friendly letter of the 7<sup>th</sup> in<sup>t</sup> I receiv<sup>d</sup> in Philadelphia the day before yesterday. I Shall be detained in this place to day & then I Shall make my best way home. I have arranged my business with the government and to my mind in a great measure, & I wish that Middletown people was in as good a Situation to pay their Debts as I am. & if they would pay more attention to their own business & less to their Neighbors they would do themselves much more honor.

I am Dear Sir

With sentiments of the  
greatest friendship your  
most Obedient Humb serv<sup>t</sup>

SIMEON NORTH.

MR. NATHAN STARR JUN<sup>r</sup>

Middletown

Connecticut

## SIMEON NORTH

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Up to this period there had never arisen the slightest disagreement between the armorer and the numerous government officials and inspectors with whom he had been called upon to deal. There is no indication anywhere in the official records that the pistols made by him under any of his contracts proved unsatisfactory, upon inspection or in actual service. Every advance made to him by the government had been fully reimbursed under the conditions of proportionate payments for which the contracts provided.

But there had occurred a change in the office of the Secretary of War; and as has frequently happened on similar occasions since, the new officials were disposed to look critically at the acts of their predecessors. Suddenly, without warning, and without explanation, the payments on account of Colonel North's deliveries had been stopped entirely. We have already quoted the memorandum indorsement on the contract, showing that this suspension of payments began with a delivery of pistols received June 22, 1814. The next record found relating to the matter is the following letter from Colonel Decius Wadsworth, Colonel of Ordnance, dated April 20, 1816. It is addressed to William H. Crawford, of Georgia, who had become Secretary of War in



## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

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the previous year, and it enclosed a report on Colonel North's establishment, made by Colonel Roswell Lee and Mr. James Stubblefield, Superintendents of the National Armories at Springfield and Harper's Ferry, together with a letter accompanying the same:

COLONEL DECIUS WADSWORTH TO SECRETARY CRAWFORD

To the Honble

WM. H. CRAWFORD NEW YORK, April 20, 1816.

SIR

I have the honor to transmit you a copy of the report made by Lieut. Col. Lee and Mr. Stubblefield, Superintendents of the National Armories, relative to Col. North's Establishment, for manufacturing Small Arms, situated at Middletown. A copy of their letter accompanying the report is also subjoined. Since the report was handed to me, I have had an opportunity of visiting the Establishment. Still I feel no small Embarrassment in coming to a conclusion about the proper course to be taken.

Mr. North has been engaged in fabricating Pistols for the government during a period of 12 or 14 years before his present contract which was entered into about 3 years ago under all the advantages of the long experience and aided by an advance of upwards of \$27,000, some small jobs in the interior which were doubtless profitable enabled him to reduce the balance to \$21,000 since which he has received a further advance of 10,000 dollars so that the balance against him is now upwards of 30,000 dollars. He talks of asking a further advance of 50,000 dollars and pro-



## SIMEON NORTH

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poses to fabricate Rifles instead of Pistols, which will delay the reimbursement of the money three or four years at least. It is a matter of regret that the model on which his contract was founded was not unexceptional, in that case, there could have been no pretense for changing the contract, for we shall undoubtedly want as many or even more pistols than he has contracted to furnish, and it would be advisable to encourage and keep up one Establishment at least in the country for fabricating that species of arms. On the other hand were the question simply about replacing indifferent pistols by good rifles there would be as little room for doubt. But it must be considered he has had little or no Experience in the business of making Rifles and only a small part of the work he has now on hand, mainly the Locks, can be applied to that purpose. The value of a Lock for a Rifle or Musket may be stated at about three Dollars when that of the Rifle complete amounts to 17 or 18 Dollars, so that the Locks are but about  $\frac{1}{6}$  of the whole expense. New Works, new Machinery, and Tools must be provided which will absorb a great deal of money. A Debt of 80,000 dollars or even 50,000 dollars against a man in the middle Ranks of Society tends materially to impair his credit and to shake mens confidence in him. I therefore entertain serious doubts whether he will be able to accomplish what he may undertake if the changes be made in his contract which are in agitation.

After taking a full view of the subject it seems to me advisable to let the contract remain on its original footing for a while at least and until the balance against Mr. North shall be reduced to 15 or 20 thousand dollars, when it would not be improper to

## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

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arrange some alternative or modification so as to receive a portion of Rifles or Pistols of a better pattern.

He will need I presume further advances immediately to enable him to get along with the business and I would recommend his receiving all the aid which prudence will justify. The manufacture of Small Arms in this country does not rest on so stable a foundation as is commonly imagined, many persons have been quite ruined in that business, and I should be sorry to see the name of Mr. North among the sufferers. As to a further advance of 50,000 dollars it seems to my view quite exorbitant. It may be prudent perhaps to allow him 10 or 15 thousand dollars more. These advances will in fact convert his Establishment into a National Armory as regards the Expence, for it will be carried on with the public money, and that under the serious disadvantage of having a place beyond the control of the National authorities.

I have the honour to be  
very respectfully Sir your  
obt Servt

(Signed) DECIUS WADSWORTH  
*Col of Ordnance.*

The report and letter enclosed by Colonel Wadsworth were as follows:

### REPORT OF COLONEL LEE AND SUPERINTENDENT STUBBLEFIELD

To the Senior Officer of the Ordnance Department:

The undersigned, being appointed to examine into the improvements made by Colonel Simeon North of Middletown, Conn., respectfully report that they have attended to the duties assigned them, and after a



## SIMEON NORTH

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thorough examination of Colonel North's works are of opinion that he has made an improvement in the lock by fitting every part to the same lock which insures a more rigid uniformity than they have heretofore known. Also his mode of stocking they consider an improvement, inasmuch as it gives more accuracy and uniformity, and by the help of water machinery facilitates the work and lessens the expense, and may advantageously be adopted and brought into uniformity with arms manufactured at the public armories.

Washington, March 20, 1816,

(Signed) JAMES STUBBLEFIELD,  
ROSWELL LEE.

*Superintendents United States Armories.*

WASHINGTON CITY, March 22, 1816.

Senior Officer,

Ordinance Department.

SIR:

We respectfully submit to you the enclosed report of Colonel Simeon North's improvements in the manufacture of arms, and we take the liberty to observe that he has a respectable establishment on a never failing stream. The principal workshop is of stone and brick, 86 by 36 feet, three stories high, in which are employed upwards of 50 workmen, and the works are calculated for near twice that number. He has a large quantity of work on hand of the various parts of the pistol, and the work is well executed, and we have no doubt but he will fulfill any engagements he may have entered into with the government.\*

(Signed) ROSWELL LEE.

JAMES STUBBLEFIELD.

\*A portion of the above letter, devoted to the manufacture of swords by Nathan Starr, and of muskets by Eli Whitney, is omitted.

## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

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It will be noted that the letter of Colonel Wadsworth was written some months after Colonel North, in response to the request of the Ordnance Bureau, had submitted the proposition for the alteration in his pistol contract of April 16, 1813, quoted above. It will also be noted that following closely upon the receipt by the Secretary of Colonel Wadsworth's letter, and the commendatory report and letter of Colonel Lee and Mr. Stubblefield, the several changes suggested in Colonel North's contract were approved by Colonel Bomford, with the sanction of Colonel Wadsworth.

That the payments were still being withheld a year later, would appear from the following letters addressed to Colonel Wadsworth by Samuel W. Dana, of Middletown. Mr. Dana was a friend and neighbor of Colonel North's, and then a United States Senator from Connecticut:

MR. DANA TO COLONEL WADSWORTH.

MIDDLETOWN (CONN) April 19 1817.

DEAR SIR:

According to conversation had with yourself at the Ordnance office, I have mentioned to Colonel Simeon North of this place the propriety of sending to your address as Colonel of Ordnance the bills for pistols furnished from his manufactory for the United States:



## SIMEON NORTH

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And I have informed him of your disposition to recommend an advance of money for him on account according to number of pistols to the amount of about six or seven dollars per pistol for such as might be delivered within six months.

And in pursuance with this information he has made calculations for the prosecution of his business. As I have considered such an advance to be but reasonable under the circumstances and believe it to be safe for the United States, I have not hesitated to comply with his request that I would enclose to your address the first bill for pistols, furnished from his factory since my return from Washington; and I now inclose the Inspection certificate with a receipt for seven hundred pistols.

*On this evidence of progress in making the pistols according to the plan of uniformity which is so interesting to the public service,\** it is hoped that you may think proper to recommend an advance of at least four thousand five hundred dollars on account.

With consideration,

I am, Dear Sir

SAM. W. DANA.

Endorsed on the face of this letter are the words

*(Ansd 25 by J. M.)*

The nature of Captain Morton's answer is revealed in a second letter of Mr. Dana to Colonel Wadsworth, bearing date of April 30, 1817.

[\*The italics are our own.]

## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

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MR. DANA TO COLONEL WADSWORTH.

MIDDLETOWN, CONN April 30 1817

SIR,

In a letter of the 19th addressed to yourself, and sent under cover to the Secretary for Department of War, I enclosed certificate and receipt for seven hundred pistols furnished for the United States from the factory of Simeon North.

And by a letter of the 25th from Captn Morton, which I have received this morning I am informed that Mr. North's bill will be transferred to the 2nd Aud. office to be passed to his credit; but that, on the subject of advance of money, Lt. Col. Bomford would beg leave to refer the application to Col Wadsworth.

Since receiving the letter from Captn Morton I learn that you have this week passed through Middletown when I was absent and as I understand from Mr. Starr that you intended to go to N York in the way towards an establishment near Albany I lose no time in requesting your attention to the subject of our conversation at Washington with reference to sending to your address any bills for pistols which Col North might furnish within six months.

Will you be so good as to express your opinion as to furnishing money for Col North on account according to number of pistols furnished? If I did not misapprehend the tenor of conversation, I have been right in leading Col. North to believe that you would be disposed to recommend an advance of money on account, to the amount of about six or seven dollars per pistol.

From the deference which is manifested for your opinion in the letter from Captn Morton, I am aware



## SIMEON NORTH

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how interesting it may be to Col North that you should write to the Secy of War or Lt Col. Bomford, as you may think proper. Col. North having gone to Philadelphia, I now write, in hope of reaching you at N. York, and that you may find it convenient to write to Washington on the subject.

Yr with esteem

S. W. DANA

Col DECIUS WADSWORTH  
of U. S. Ordnance  
New York

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*Endorsement on above letter:*

S. W. DANA Esq.  
Middletown 30 Apr. 1817  
resps Simeon North's advance

On the same date, Mr. Dana replied to Captain Morton:

MR. DANA TO CAPTAIN MORTON

MIDDLETOWN, (CONN.) April 30, 1817

SIR,

I have this day received your letter of the 25th acknowledging my letter of the 19th addressed to Col Wadsworth.

As I am since informed that Col Wadsworth (in my temporary absence from Middletown) passed through this place in the way from Boston to N York, will you be pleased to transmit to him a copy of my letter that he may recommend whatever he may judge proper in relation to furnishing money on account for Mr. Simeon North? I am the more disposed to re-

## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

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quest attention to this subject, as Mr. North, having gone from Middletown on business having relation to his contracts, did not have opportunity of seeing Col Wadsworth on his way from Boston.

Your obt

SAM. W. DANA

CAPT N JOHN MORTON  
of U. S. Ordnance.

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*Endorsement on above letter:*

SAM. W. DANA

Middletown Apl. 30, 1817

respect. Simeon North

(Sent his first letter to Col. W. May 7)

In his former letter he recommended \$4,500 to be advanced to Colonel North.

From a letter of Colonel North of May 27, 1817, it appears that payment for the pistols delivered on April 19 was still suspended:

COL. NORTH TO CAPTAIN MORTON

MIDDLETOWN CONN. May 27, 1817.

SIR:

Your Circular of the 22nd Inst. is received, my Bills for pistols furnished on Contract for U. S. (since the transfer of the Business from the Commissary General) have been presented to the Ordnance Department before they were rendered to the auditing officer, and copies would readily have been left at the Ordnance Department, if understood at the time to be desired.

You may recollect, Sir, that my bill dated the 19th of April last for Seven hundred Pistols, was inclosed



## SIMEON NORTH

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in a Letter to Col. Wadsworth from Mr. Dana, who wrote at my request, as he had conversed with Col. Wadsworth in relation to the course of proceeding, and your Letter of the 25th of April to Mr. Dana informed him that my Bill would be transferred to the 2d Auditor of the Treasury Office to be passed to my Credit.

I had hoped before this time to receive a sum of money on account of this Bill according to conversation which I supposed to be well understood at the Department.

In consequence of your Circular, I now forward duplicates of my last bill, and of three former Bills which were presented by Mr. Dana and seen by Col. Wadsworth.

Very respectfully,

I am Sir

Yr Obt Servt

SIMEON NORTH

CAPT. JOHN MORTON

United States Ordnance Department Washington  
City

On June 14, Mr. Dana writes the Acting  
Secretary of War:

MR. DANA TO ACTING SECRETARY GRAHAM

MIDDLETOWN 14 June 1817

SIR,

Yesterday Col Wadsworth of the Ordnance was in Middletown and delivered to me an open letter to your address, which I have now the honor to enclose.

## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

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Mr. Simeon North's bill for seven hundred pistols was received at the Ordnance Office, in the absence of Col Wadsworth, and transferred to the auditing office, to be passed to Mr. North's credit, in April last, as appears by letter from Captn. Morton under date of the 25th of April. Since that time no remittance for the pistols had been received. Yet the expectation of a proportionate remittance was believed to be warranted by the true intents of the contracts made by the Commissary General in April, 1813 and recognized with alterations as stated by Mr. North in Jan'y 1816 and confirmed by the signature of Lt. Col. Bomford of the ordnance in May 1816 and deposited in the late office of Accountants of the war department.

The opinion was supported, in my view of the subject, by the recollection of conversation which I had the honor to have with Mr. Crawford while Secretary of War and by the recollection of Col Wadsworth's conversation last spring as mentioned in his letter.

As it is conformable to the interests of the United States and the evident policy of the government to encourage the domestic fabrication of arms; and as the considerations mentioned by Col Wadsworth are so decisive as to evince the propriety of remitting money to Mr. North on account of pistols actually furnished for the United States; I have supposed it only necessary for yourself to be informed of the fact for the purpose of expediting the remittance, which is so fully approved by the Colonel of Ordnance.

With respectful consideration,

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your very obt

SAM. W. DANA.



## SIMEON NORTH

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*Endorsements on above letter:*

HONBLE, SAMUEL W. DANA  
Middletown Cont. 14 June 1817  
Mr. North's contract, etc.

Col. Bomford will have a remittance made at the rate of \$12 per each pair of Pistols, delivered—and inform Mr. North that a remittance at the rate of *ten* dollars a pair will be made for the future deliveries untill further advised.

GEO. GRAHAM

(GEORGE GRAHAM, ESQ.  
*Acting Secretary of War*  
Washington)

Ansd. by Ordn Dept 20 June—Allowance to Mr. North finally agreed to by Act. Secry \$7 per pair for present and future deliveries till advances to him shall be refunded.

J. M.

On the same date Colonel Wadsworth, who was then in Middletown, and had evidently been in consultation with Colonel North, wrote the following letter to the Acting Secretary of War:

COLONEL WADSWORTH TO THE SECRETARY

1895347

MIDDLETOWN June 14, 1817.

GEORGE GRAHAM, ESQ.

SIR:

Mr. Simeon North has been thrown into some Embarrassment in Consequence of the Delay in remitting for the Pistols lately delivered on his Contract. The Balance of Advances made to him is still



## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

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considerable, but it would be very injurious to him to exact the Repayment of the whole of those Advances at this Stage of the Business. The Practice has usually been in such Cases to make a proportionate Deduction of the Advances on each Delivery, and this Course I should think would be Most equitable in Mr. North's Case. I should presume the Sum of twelve Dollars for each Pair of Pistols delivered on his Contract might be remitted at present, which will make a Deduction of about two Dollars per Pair from the Contract Price to be applied to extinguish the Balance due on Account of Advance. It is very important Mr. North should fully understand the Footing on which this Business will rest in future, that he may encounter no Disappointment. I gave Mr. Dana reason to believe before he left Washington at the Close of the Session of Congress, that Remittances would be made to Mr. North to the amount of ten or twelve dollars for each Pair of Pistols to be delivered on the Contract, which I did upon the Presumption of its being the regular Course of Business and the established Practice. The outgoings at an establishment of the Kind are constant and great and unless Measures can be adopted to ensure regular Supplies of Money the Business will either progress languidly or be altogether stopped.

I have the Honor to be

Very respectfully Sir

Your obedt Servt.

DECIUS WADSWORTH

*Col. of Ordnance.*

The endorsements upon Mr. Dana's letter, show that the original decision of the Acting

## SIMEON NORTH

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Secretary, to pay Colonel North at the rate of \$12 per each pair of pistols already delivered (in accordance with the terms of the amended contract) was immediately reconsidered, and the third endorsement indicates that a payment of \$7 per pair was "finally agreed to by the Acting Secretary of War."

On June 20, Captain Morton wrote a long letter to Mr. Dana in reply to the latter's communication, in which, after re-stating the status of Colonel North's account, he disclaimed with some show of heat, any personal enmity or any interest of a personal nature, in the delay that had occurred in the payments to Colonel North, and finally concluded by inquiring into the sufficiency of his bonds.

CAPTAIN MORTON TO MR. DANA

ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON,

June 20, 1817.

SIR:

Your communication to the Acting Secretary of War has been received and referred to this Department. I am instructed in consequence respectfully to state to you that there has ever existed on the part of the Government and with this Department, as a subordinate branch, a disposition to encourage the domestic fabrication of arms to every extent which the public service required or would admit. Whether in the case of Simeon North that disposition has been



## MIDLETOWN FACTORY

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exercised may perhaps be best illustrated by the following statement: On the 16th of April, 1813, Mr. North contracted with the Commissary General of Purchases for the manufacture of 20,000 pistols deliverable within five years from that date.

From the Commissary General	{ On July 19, 1813 he received in advance on said contract the sum of . . . \$20,000
From Ordnance Department	{ February 18, 1814, . . . 5,000
	{ Jan. 17, 1816, . . . . 10,000
	{ May 19, 1816, . . . . 15,000
	\$50,000

exclusive of 2400 pistols due by him on an old contract with Tench Coxe and the amount of a bill paid him last Spring, without any deduction, as is usual.

Of the 20,000 pistols contracted for, Mr. North in June 1815 had only delivered 1156 in better than two years' existence of his contract. The officers of the Audit Department in making a statement of Mr North's account for the Acting Secretary of War, have recommended that the accommodation thus extended to him is greater than any ever allowed to any contracting manufacturer and for which also the least return has been made that appears on record. You will certainly believe, Sir, that we can have no personal enmity to Mr. North or are actuated by any interest of a personal nature, but the policy of such indulgence we are inclined to believe is under any conditions extremely doubtful, and rather tending to the establishment of a dangerous precedent. Notwithstanding the peculiar circumstances herein

## SIMEON NORTH

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stated and from consideration suggested in your and Colonel Wadsworth's letters, the Acting Secretary of War has directed that a payment be made to Mr. North on his last delivery of April at the rate of \$7. per pair and that the same proportion be allowed and paid upon his future deliveries until the advances be somewhat further refunded. From a minute memorandum made in our office last Winter during my illness, we are much inclined to believe that Col. Wadsworth has remained under the impression that Mr. North had only received \$25,000, in the advances made at the recommendation of this office without adverting to that of \$25,000. previously made by the Commissary General of Purchases.\* As upon examination we find that Messrs. J. & J. Savage are the only sureties upon the whole of the advances made, and as it has been thought proper by Mr. North to interest you in his behalf, we have on the part of the United States also to request the favor of your opinion as to the sufficiency of these gentlemen for the responsibilities they have undertaken.

Respectfully & etc.,

JOHN MORTON.

HON. SAMUEL W. DANA,  
Middletown, Conn.

Mr. Dana made quick reply, and disclaiming any thought that the treatment accorded Colonel North had been inspired by personal enmity,

\*That Colonel Wadsworth was fully informed regarding the advances made to Colonel North by the Commissary General is quite evident, as the matter is referred to in detail in his letter of April 20, 1816, to the Secretary of War.



## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

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he pointed out, what has already appeared in this correspondence, and what Captain Morton had overlooked, that "the expenditures requisite to the advantageous commencement of deliveries of pistols entirely uniform in general proportions and particular parts," should "materially exceed the rates of accommodation in ordinary contracts:"

MR. DANA TO CAPTAIN MORTON

MIDDLETOWN, CONN. 26 June 1817

SIR,

I have the honor to acknowledge your letter of the 20th of this month, which was received yesterday.

As I was aware of the advances made Mr. Simeon North on account of his contracts; while I believed that the expenditures requisite to the advantageous commencement of *deliveries of pistols entirely uniform in the general proportions and particular parts\** would materially exceed the rates of accommodation in ordinary contracts; I was willing to give the full evidence of my conviction that the policy of the public service would authorize the proportionate remittance which was approved by Colonel Wadsworth.

I request, Sir, that it may not be supposed for a moment that I could admit the least suspicion of your having any personal enmity to Mr. North: But as my general opinion on that subject had been manifested in conversation, I was ready to assume the responsibility involved in a written expression of opinion.

\*The italics are our own.

## SIMEON NORTH

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As desired in your letter, I have no hesitation in declaring my opinion of the sufficiency of Messrs. J. & J. Savage for the responsibility which they have taken on account of Mr. S. North. Indeed Mr. North himself is a person of solid property to the amount of some tens of thousands. His works appeared in good order and were seen in general operation when visited by the President of the United States on Monday the 23rd of this month.

Respectfully, I have the honor to be, Sir,  
Yr very Obt.

SAM. W. DANA.

CAPT. JOHN MORTON  
of the U. S. Ordnance

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*Endorsement on above letter:*

Ansd 3 July that an add'l  
advc wl be allowed Mr. North.

Disregarding for the moment the chronological sequence of these letters, we may now introduce the correspondence between Captain Morton and Colonel North relating to this matter:

CAPTAIN MORTON TO COLONEL NORTH  
ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON,  
JUNE 19, 1817.

MR. SIMEON NORTH,  
Middletown, Connecticut.

SIR:

I am directed to inform you that the Acting Secretary of War has directed a remittance to be made you of \$7 per pair upon your bill for pistols delivered



## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

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in April last on your contract with the United States, and that in future the same proportion will be paid upon your deliveries until the large advances made to you shall be somewhat further refunded. The communications of Colonel Wadsworth and Mr. Dana to the Acting Secretary of War have been received and referred to this Department with instructions to report to him the exact state of your account with the United States. We are very strongly convinced that Colonel Wadsworth must have been under the impression that you had only received \$25,000. instead of \$50,000. in advances. Your account will still stand debited after the present remittance with about \$42,000. The officers of the Ordnance Office in furnishing a statement of your account for the Acting Secretary of War, remarked that the accommodation in these advances was greater than any contracting manufacturer had ever received from the Government, and for such advances the least return on record had also been made.

Respectfully, etc.,

JOHN MORTON.

### COLONEL NORTH'S REPLY TO CAPTAIN MORTON

MIDDLETOWN, CONN.,

JUNE 27, 1817.

SIR:

Your letter of the 19th instant informing me that the Acting Secretary of War had directed a remittance of seven dollars per pair on my bill for pistols in April last was duly received, also one from the Treasurer of the United States inclosing a draft for two thousand four hundred and fifty dollars.

## SIMEON NORTH

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The Hon. Saml. W. Dana visited my factory a few days before he wrote to the Secretary of War, and the day Col. Wadsworth wrote, I had the pleasure of having my whole establishment reviewed by that Honorable Gentleman, and I am persuaded that they both well understood the amount of money advanced to me by the Government.

When the nature of my contract for pistols, and the extent of the works, and the variety of mechanism required for carrying *the important principles of uniformity into complete effect as to the pistols and parts of pistols*,\* and expense incurred by myself for accomplishing the object systematically, amounting to more than one hundred thousand dollars already, shall have been fully considered, I am persuaded that the advances made to me on account will be regarded as not more than reasonable. I have now actually employed in this business about seventy men and are now making about thirty pistols per day, and if I can receive with punctuality the proportionate remittances on deliveries of pistols which I expected according to terms of contract as made with the Commissary General and modified by the Lieut. Col. of Ordnance with the expressed sanction of Colonel Wadsworth and the knowledge of the Secretary of War, I shall very soon increase the number to more than forty pistols per day.

I am very respectfully Sir, your most obedient humble servant,

SIMEON NORTH.

JOHN MORTON, ESQ.,  
*Captain of U. S. Ordnance.*

\*The italics are our own.



## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

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The reader who has followed the above correspondence from the beginning will hardly fail to agree that Colonel North's reply to Captain Morton was dignified and well contained. "Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just." He made no reference to the annoyance and embarrassment to which he had been subjected by the suspension of payments on account. But he did insist that for the reasons stated the advances made him were "not more than reasonable." And in conclusion he quietly reminded Captain Morton that the suspension of "the proportionate remittances on deliveries," was in direct violation of the terms of his existing contract, which had been approved by Colonel Bomford, and that it had materially retarded the production of pistols in the quantity for which the contract called.

The letters of Senator Dana and Colonel North produced an immediate effect. In his reply to Colonel North, Captain Morton announced that a payment of \$10 per pair of pistols (instead of \$7) would be made on future deliveries, and that the difference would also be allowed on the last delivery, thus tacitly admitting that the department had been in the wrong:

## SIMEON NORTH

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CAPTAIN MORTON TO COLONEL NORTH

ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON,

3rd of July, 1817.

MR. SIMEON NORTH,  
Middletown, Connecticut.

SIR:

This is to acknowledge your communication of the 27th ult. A letter from Mr. Dana of the 26th has also been received. They have both been laid before the Acting Secretary of War, and in consequence of the representations which they contain, I am authorized to state that the payment of \$10. per pair on your future deliveries of pistols will be made and that the difference will be allowed on your last delivery either on or before your next bill as you may desire.

Respectfully, etc.,

JOHN MORTON,  
*Captain.*

Colonel North's reply was characteristically laconic:

COLONEL NORTH TO CAPTAIN MORTON

MIDDLETOWN, CONN. 8 July 1817

SIR

I have the honor to acknowledge recpt of your letter dated the 3rd Inst. & note the contents.

Will you have the goodness to forward me the difference of my Bill of Seven Hundred Pistols, with the



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payment of my Bill of five hundred which I forwarded on the 4th Inst.

Respectfully,

I am, Sir

Your Ob Servt

SIMEON NORTH

CAPT. JOHN MORTON

Ordnance Dept

Washington City

At the end of the last sentence of the above letter in the files there is written by the hand of a clerk the word (Done); and endorsed upon the bottom of the letter are the following computations relating to the payments due and made:

350	700	250—10 \$
7	7	350    3 \$
———	———	
2550	4900	

Here there occurs a hiatus in the correspondence, as it is now filed in the War Department. One of the lost letters was from Colonel North, dated Nov. 5, 1817, and containing his bill for 500 pistols delivered, as appears from Captain Morton's reply, dated Nov. 10. It is also evident that in this letter Colonel North again called attention to the terms of his amended contract, which the government officials were still ignoring:

## SIMEON NORTH

---

CAPTAIN MORTON TO COLONEL NORTH

ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT,  
WASHINGTON, Nov. 10, 1817.

SIR:

Your letter to this department covering bill and inspection of 500 pistols of the 5th inst has been received. During my illness last winter the memorandum of your agreement with the Department for the increase of price to be allowed you on your contract has been mislaid either in this or the Auditor's Office. Our clerk is confident he deposited it with the latter, but it cannot be found, and a difficulty is made in adjusting your bills (even though payments are only made on account) at the rate of \$16 per pair. It will be necessary, therefore, for you to transmit to us such memoranda as you have in your possession relating thereto in order to avoid any further difficulty or delay in settling your bills. They have also suggested at the Auditor's that your contract requires the delivery of pistols at Norwich or New York, and on referring to it I find it does "after danger from capture from the enemy shall have ceased," a circumstance which from the contract having been made with Colonel Irvine, had escaped my notice.

It will be required, therefore, that you produce a receipt on your bills from the commanding officer of Ordnance or one of the United States Military store-keepers at New York for their delivery there.

Your early answer is requested, particularly as your



## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

---

last bill will not be passed without the agreement for the rise of price being produced.

I am, very respectfully, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

JOHN MORTON, *Captain*.

SIMEON NORTH, Esq.,

Middletown, Conn.

This letter throws a flood of light upon the unpleasant situation which had so long existed, and puts the curious conduct of the Ordnance Department in a far better light than it has previously appeared. The agreement between the Department and Colonel North of May 9, 1816, amending the contract of April 16, 1813, had been lost or mislaid during all these months in which the armorer had been refused a large proportion of the money due him under this agreement. And this refusal originated with the officer who writes, in a subsequent letter (see page 129) that he was positive all the time that "the agreement was on file at the second auditor's office, having delivered it from my (his) sick chamber last spring for the very purpose of having it enrolled in the proper office." Here it was duly found, "though repeatedly denied before."

Colonel North promptly forwarded a certified copy of the agreement, with the following reply:

## SIMEON NORTH

---

COLONEL NORTH TO CAPTAIN MORTON

MIDDLETOWN, CONN.,  
November 15, 1817.

SIR:

Your letter of the 10th was received yesterday. I regret that the memorandum of agreement for increase of price to be allowed on my contract for pistols, has been mislaid, as mentioned in your letter; especially as I have lately been making arrangements for increasing the business at my factory, under the expectation of receiving a due proportion for all the pistols delivered up to this time.

A copy of the terms of agreement signed by Lt. Col. Bomford and deposited in the Office of Accountant of War Department, as certified by the Accountant March 3rd 1817, is in my possession; of which a copy is now transmitted.

It is true, my contract of the 16th of April 1813 with the Commissary General contains a clause in these words, "The pistols are to be delivered at Norwich, Conn., or at New York, if it should be required, after the danger of capture by the enemy shall have ceased," but it was not required of me to deliver the pistols at either of those places; and I have continued to make deliveries from time to time into the store of Messrs. John & Daniel Hinsdale in Middletown, which has been selected for the United States, as I understood, by proper authority. For the pistols so delivered into the store, Messrs. John & Daniel Hinsdale, according to their receipts, are responsible to the United States, so that I have no control over them.

As to future deliveries, it will be my care to make



## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

---

them at New York, if required on the part of the Government. At the same time it is hoped that I may continue to make delivery on public account into the store at Middletown, at least during the approaching winter; when it is considered how much inconvenience, expense, and delay I might suffer in sending pistols by land to New York after the passage of Connecticut River and Long Island Sound shall be obstructed by ice.

If the expense of transporting pistols to New York should be deemed an object of importance as to future deliveries, it would be preferable for me to deliver them into the store of Messrs. J. & D. Hinsdale at Middletown until next summer, and then pay freight and charges for transportation to New York.

Very respectfully, Sir,

Your obedient and humble servant,

SIMEON NORTH.

JNO. MORTON, ESQ.,

*Capt. U. S. Ordnance.*

CAPTAIN MORTON TO COLONEL NORTH

ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON,

November 20, 1817.

SIR:

Your communication of the 15th inst at hand. Upon presenting the attested copy of your agreement at the 2nd Auditor's office, the original, though repeatedly denied before, was found on file, I was positive it was there, having delivered it from my sick chamber last Spring to our clerk for the very purpose of having it enrolled in the proper office.

With regard to the delivery of the pistols at New

## SIMEON NORTH

---

York, the remark or intimation recently made to you on that subject was general and was not, of course, intended to be enjoined when difficulties such as the obstruction of the navigation should intervene. The Messrs. Hinsdale, we presume, were appointed by Col. Irvine, United States store-keeper, as we have no knowledge of any other. They and Captain Tyler at New York were written to some time since to have all the public property then in their hands removed to New York but have heard from neither since. Will you be at the trouble to inquire into the nature of Messrs. Hinsdale's instructions as to keeping of the public stores, their terms, etc. We do not know of any objection to their being continued in charge of what may be deposited in your city, but it is desirable to know the terms, etc.

Respectfully, etc.,

JOHN MORTON, *Captain.*

SIMEON NORTH,  
Middletown.

Thus, after more than a year's delay, largely due to carelessness in the War Department in mislaying the memorandum of the agreement with Colonel North, this misunderstanding was straightened out, and the work on the contract continued at accelerated speed. It was finally completed, in a satisfactory manner, the government receiving back, in the form of pistols, every dollar it had advanced to Colonel North to enable him to undertake the manufacture of



## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

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pistols in duplicate and the filling of so large a contract, necessitating, as it did, the building and equipping of an entire new plant.

Here endeth the one disagreeable chapter it has been necessary to write for this Memoir. We do not further comment upon the attitude of the Department; the correspondence speaks for itself. We presume that Colonel North's experience with the government has been often duplicated since.

The other side of the shield in the experience of Colonel North, is the bright side. He passed through the crucial test of the large contract of 1813, with its rigid requirements for the perfect interchangeability of every part of every pistol, completely met; with the very heavy advances of the government entirely repaid; without a single criticism upon the quality of his product, without a weapon rejected, so far as the records show; and it seems to be evident, from the official documents we have been able to present, that he would have been successful in completing his engagements nearly or quite within the time prescribed in the amended contract, if the government itself, by arbitrarily ignoring its agreements, had not rendered that impossible. The chapters following, which recite Colonel

## SIMEON NORTH

---

North's subsequent contracts with the government, reveal the fact that never afterwards, in the thirty years in which he continued to carry on business with the War and Navy Departments, did a single difference or disagreement arise between them. It may fairly be inferred that the government, as represented by its officials who perpetuate its traditions, had learned from the incidents recorded in this chapter, that Colonel North was a man to be depended upon, a man whose word was as good as his bond.

An especially gratifying feature of the correspondence is the fact that Colonel Decius Wadsworth,—who was the first official to raise a question as to Colonel North's responsibility,—after visiting the factory, studying his methods and coming to know him personally, was the first to discover that the government had made no mistake in trusting him.

And we, who revive the story of these experiences, look back with honest pride to this record of his conduct during these intensely critical years of his business career. He wrote no word, under the stress and pressure of a crisis which meant success or failure, that we would recall or alter. He kept a level head and a discreet pen.



## MIDDLETOWN FACTORY

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He neither cringed, nor apologized, nor threatened, nor entreated, nor lost his temper. He asked nothing to which he was not entitled by the letter of his bond. He did not even ask that. He simply stated his case. And that proved, in the end, to be all sufficient.

We who sprang from his loins can recall the record with pride, and paraphrasing famous lines can say

Here was a man  
Who could do, and dare not lie.

## CHAPTER VI

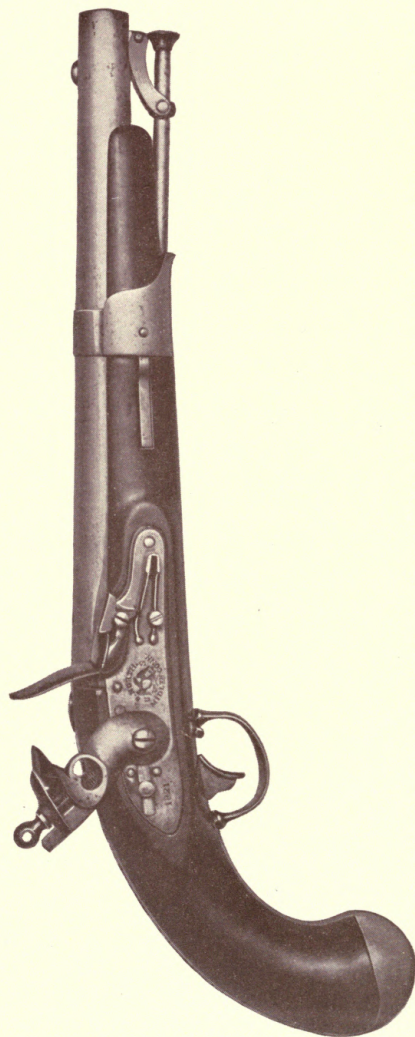
### THE LAST PISTOL CONTRACTS

HE misunderstanding in connection with the contract of 1813, recited in the last chapter, was the first and only one that arose between Colonel North and the government officials in the course of business relations covering more than fifty years, involving many contracts, and sums of money which for the time were large. These relations were almost continuous during that long period; and the fact that they were so entirely friendly, so uniformly courteous, and were carried forward from year to year with but a single misunderstanding as to money details, reflects equal credit upon all parties concerned.

Before Colonel North had completed the contract of 1813, the War Department entered into negotiations with him for another, as appears from the following letter from Colonel Wadsworth, of the Ordnance Bureau:







Horse pistol; model of 1819. Length  $15\frac{3}{8}$  inches. Length of barrel  $10\frac{1}{8}$  inches. Caliber, 54. Swivel ramrod. Sight on barrel. Iron mountings.



## LAST PISTOL CONTRACTS

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COLONEL WADSWORTH TO COLONEL NORTH:

THE ORDNANCE OFFICE, WASHINGTON

May 21, 1819.

MR. SIMEON NORTH,  
Middletown, Connecticut.

SIR:

I have forwarded to your address two boxes or cases; one containing a pair of pistols for yourself, the other a pattern rifle for Mr. Johnson of which you will please to notify him. As the Secretary of War is now absent, I can enter into no positive arrangement with you until his return. I desire, however, you will forward me proposals for making 10,000 pairs of pistols according to the pattern now sent, though it does not come exactly to my ideas, the barrel being rather too great a taper from the breech to the muzzle. If the barrel were made a little thicker at the muzzle than the pattern now sent without, however, being quite so thick at the muzzle as at the breech, it would please me much better. This can make no difference in the execution. Please forward your proposal as early as you think proper, and if it be necessary, I can refer the subject to the Secretary before his return.

Respectfully, &c.,

DECIUS WADSWORTH,

*Colonel of Ordnance.*

Six weeks later, the following contract was signed:

CONTRACT OF JULY 1, 1819.

THIS AGREEMENT made the twenty first Day of July, One Thousand eight hundred and nineteen,

## SIMEON NORTH

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Between Decius Wadsworth, Colonel of Ordnance in the Service of the United States, with the approbation and Consent of the Honorable John C. Calhoun, Secretary of War and Simeon North of the Town of Middletown in the State of Connecticut, WITNESSETH

1. That the said Simeon North doth covenant and agree to manufacture and deliver for the Service of the United States, Ten Thousand Pairs of Horseman's Pistols at the Rate of Two Thousand Pairs of Pistols a Year, computing from the present Date, that is to say, so that not less than fifteen hundred Pairs, nor more than twenty five hundred Pairs shall be delivered in a Single Year.

2. It is agreed that the Pistols shall be manufactured comformably to a Pattern which has been furnished by the Ordnance Department; and shall be in quality of Workmanship equal to the Said Pattern, and shall be inspected by an Officer or Agent of the Ordnance Department, and certified by such Inspector to be conformable to the Pattern, and equal in quality of Workmanship to the said Pattern.

3. It is agreed that the said Pistols shall be inspected and delivered at Middletown in the State of Connecticut, (the inspection being made at the Expençe of the United States) and that the said Pistols shall be carefully packed in good and sufficient cases for Transportation, it being understood that the said Simeon North shall be allowed a reasonable Price for the Cases or Boxes made use of in packing the Pistols.

4. It is agreed that the Price of the said Pistols shall be sixteen Dollars for the Pair or eight Dollars for each Pistol, payable in the manner hereafter Specified.



## LAST PISTOL CONTRACTS

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5. It is covenanted and agreed on the Part of the United States that there Shall be paid in Advance to the said Simeon North the Sum of Twenty Thousand Dollars, on Condition of his furnishing approved Security for the due Performance of this Contract. That is to say, Ten Thousand Dollars, part of the said advance shall be paid to him after the completion of the Contract, in which he is at present employed; and Ten Thousand Dollars the Remainder of the said advance, at the Expiration of Six Months therefrom.

The Inspection and Delivery of the said Pistols shall be made in Parcels of five hundred Pairs at a Time or thereabouts.

7. The said Simeon North shall be entitled to receive Payments on account for Pistols actually inspected and delivered at the Rate of fourteen Dollars a Pair, a Deduction of two Dollars a Pair being made to cover the Monies agreed to be paid in Advance.

8. It is covenanted and agreed on the Part of the said Simeon North, that no Member of Congress is or shall be interested directly or indirectly in this Contract, or in any Profits arising from the same.

IN WITNESS whereof the Parties have hereunto set their Hands and Seals the Day and Year first above written.

SIMEON NORTH [SEAL]

Sealed and Delivered  
in presence of

M. O. MORTON  
WM. REDDALL

DECIUS WADSWORTH  
*Co. of Ordnance* [SEAL]

The bond under the contract of July 21, 1819, was for \$40,000 and the sureties were

## SIMEON NORTH

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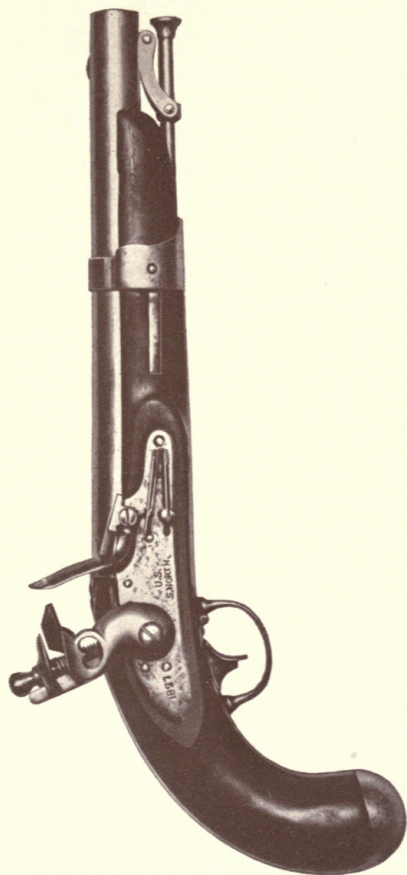
Josiah Savage, Elisha Cheney and Reuben North.

This pistol is known among collectors as the 1821 model with swivel ramrod, and is a symmetrical, well balanced weapon.

That Colonel North had by this time put his establishment in perfect working order, and was able to expeditiously meet his engagements with the government, is indicated by the rapidity of his deliveries under the contract of 1819. Within the first year after the agreement, he delivered 2,000 pistols; in 1821, the delivery was 7,000 pistols; in 1822, it was 8,000; and in 1823, it was 3,000,—the whole 20,000 called for by the contract thus being turned over to the government fourteen months in advance of the specified time, the final delivery having been made May 1.

On November 16, 1826, Colonel North was given an order to deliver within one year 1,000 naval pistols at \$7 each. The pistols made under this contract are known among collectors as the short navy with swivel ramrod. They were all to be delivered on or before the first day of October, 1827. They were to be made with "uniform locks and the usual uniform component parts." The bond was for \$3,000. A





Navy pistol; model of 1826-27-28. Length 13 $\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Length of barrel 8 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches.  
Caliber, 54. Swivel ramrod. Iron mountings.





## LAST PISTOL CONTRACTS

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copy of this contract is in the possession of the authors; but its terms are so nearly similar to those of the contracts already quoted that it does not seem necessary to reproduce it here.

The pistols were delivered and accepted within the contract period. A duplicate contract for a like number of the same pistols was entered into on December 12, 1827, with a bond of \$2,800. A third contract in identical terms bears date of August 18, 1828. Duplicates of all these contracts are in the writers' possession. All of them were discharged within the periods named.

The contract of August 18, 1828, was the last pistol contract made by the government with Colonel North, all his subsequent contracts being for rifles and carbines, as will be narrated. Between the date of the first contract, in 1799, and this last one, in 1828, Colonel North appears to have been the only private citizen who manufactured pistols for the government. Therefore we have called him on the title page the "first official pistol maker of the United States." We do not find record of any further contracts for pistols until May 27, 1836, when R. and J. Johnson, of Middletown, con-

## SIMEON NORTH

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tracted for horse pistols, and on September 22, of the same year, Asa Waters contracted for 4,000 of the same arm.\*

There exists some uncertainty as to the total number of pistols manufactured for the government by Colonel North during this period, due to the fact that there evidently occurred extensions under some of his contracts, the details of which we have not been able to find in the records. But the number was not less than 50,000, and the total sum paid him by the government under his various pistol contracts was about \$400,000.

\*Several references to the two national armories at Springfield and Harper's Ferry appear in the correspondence in this volume. That at Springfield grew up out of a recruiting post, depot for the storage of military supplies, and place for repairing arms, established during the Revolution. Between 1781 and 1794, it was employed as a Massachusetts State Armory and a few military pistols are known to have been made there in 1787. In 1792 Congress authorized the President to establish two National Arsenals,—that is, places for the storage of arms; two years later he was instructed to establish two places for the manufacture of arms,—that is, armories. President Washington chose for both purposes Springfield in the north and Harper's Ferry in the south. An appropriation of \$340,000 was made for the purchase of stores and arms. It appears from the Ordnance Reports that there were only forty employees at Springfield the first year, and they succeeded in making but 245 muskets, or less than one per day. Perhaps it was this experience which led the government to make contracts with private manufacturers; for musket contracts with Eli Whitney, D. Gilbert and McCormick, were made in 1798, and the pistol contract with Simeon North in 1799. Not one of the three first mentioned had ever made a gun before, but all three proved worthy of the trust.



## LAST PISTOL CONTRACTS

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Just why Colonel North wished to change his business from the manufacture of pistols into that of guns, does not appear in any record or correspondence that can be traced. It is probable that he saw a larger government demand for the latter arm, and that the pistol requirements of the future would not be sufficient to keep busy the large establishment he had equipped and the trained body of assistants who had grown up in his employ. The first mention of his desire to make the change appears in the letter of Colonel Decius Wadsworth, dated April 20, 1816; and seven years elapsed before he realized his desire.

In the meanwhile, the story ends here, so far as it concerns the "first official pistol maker of the United States."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FIRST RIFLE CONTRACTS

**I**T HAS appeared that as early as 1816 Colonel North had indicated his desire to extend his business by adding the manufacture of rifles to that of pistols. At that time he was apparently willing to surrender the pistol contract then running and to substitute a rifle contract. Nothing came of it at the time, and the contract of July 21, 1819, for 20,000 pistols, intervened, before his ambition was gratified. On March 5, 1823, Colonel North, being then in Washington, submitted the following proposition to the Secretary of War:

COLONEL NORTH TO THE SECRETARY OF WAR:

WASHINGTON CITY 5th March 1823

Simeon North of Middletown Connecticut, proposes to manufacture and deliver into the public store in Middletown Connt. Ten thousand rifles of equal quality of those manufactured by Mr. Robert Johnson in the year of 1822, at \$14.50 ea. per rifle, the deliveries to be made as follows, viz



## FIRST RIFLE CONTRACTS

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In the year of 1823	1000 Rifles
do 1824	1400
do in 1825	2000
do in 1826	2600
do in 1827	3000
Total	10,000 at \$14.50

would amount to 145,000 dollars, averaging \$29,000 pr year, and as this is \$3000. pr year less than has ever been set apart for my establishment for ten years past, I therefore hope you will not think this proposition unreasonable.

I have the honor to be, with the  
highest respect, your most obedient, Humble  
Servt

SIMEON NORTH.

The Hon. Secretary of War,

The following are the endorsements upon this letter:

Ansd verbally  
could give him only  
1200 per an

Simeon North Esq<sup>r</sup>  
Washington City  
5 March 1823

Proposition to manufacture  
arms for the U. S.

The endorsement indicates that the armorer received a verbal reply that only 6,000 rifles

## SIMEON NORTH

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could be allotted to him at that time, instead of the 10,000 which he was prepared to manufacture. Although he does not appear to have been awarded a contract until December 10, in that year, he evidently received instructions to proceed with arrangements for their manufacture, and a draft of a form of contract for rifles was submitted to him by Colonel Bomford, of the Ordnance Bureau, on August 13. In the meanwhile he received another order for pistols, (apparently by an extension of the contract of 1819, for there is no record of any additional contract). The evidence of this appears in a postscript to Colonel North's letter of August 19, acknowledging receipt of the proposed rifle contract, in which he states that certain pistols mentioned in a previous letter [not found] will be ready for inspection in about two weeks. This same postscript is the evidence that Colonel North had been authorized to proceed with the manufacture of rifles, pending agreement upon contract.

The letter to which this postscript is attached declares that the proposed form of rifle contract "is agreeable to my calculation, except in a few particulars," which are stated:



## FIRST RIFLE CONTRACTS

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COLONEL NORTH TO COLONEL BOMFORD

Ansd Oct<sup>r</sup> 20<sup>th</sup>

Middletown Conn August 19, 1823.

SIR

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 13th Inst by mail of yesterday, together with a draft or form for a contract, for the examination of Mr. Starr, Mr. Johnson, and myself.

Mr. Starr and Mr. Johnson have examined the form, and they will write to you their opinion respecting it.

The draft or form is agreeable to my calculation except in a few particulars. At the time I was in Washington it was my understanding, that I was to manufacture the Rifles for fourteen Dollars and fifty cents, each, complete, to be equal in every part to those manufactured by Mr. Johnson for the United States in 1822, including the same number of extra limbs which he then furnished, which as I understood was for every twenty rifles, twenty seven drivers and two spring vices, for which purpose I expected a box of rifles, manufactured by Mr. Johnson in 1822 to govern the Inspection.

It will be equally as agreeable to me, to have my work in quality, predicated on the workmanship of the Arms manufactured at the National Armory, as is stated in the form of Contract.

But it being stated in the form for contract, for every twenty rifles, twenty flints, two bullet-moulds, twenty wipers, two ball screws, and forty flint caps, more than Mr. Johnson furnished at that time, which will cost me at least twenty five cents on each rifle, above what my calculation was, which I shall cheerfully submit to

## SIMEON NORTH

---

you, whether I shall be paid for them, extra, or not, in connexion with the cost of the packing boxes.

I herewith transmit back the draft or form for contract, as requested.

Respectfully Sir

I am yr obt Hble servt

SIMEON NORTH

P.S. The Pistols which I mentioned in my last letter to the Ordnance Depart. will be ready for inspection in about two weeks from this time. At which time I shall have about two hundred rifle barrels ready for proving, and should it be necessary that the inspector should have directions from the Ordnance Department respecting proving them, will you have the goodness to give such directions, whereby I may be able to have a proof of the rifle barrels at that time.

& oblige Respectfully,

Sir yr obt & Hble Servt

S NORTH

GEORGE BOMFORD ESQ<sup>R</sup>

*Lt Col U States Ordnance Dept*  
Washington City.

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*Endorsement on back of above letter:*

SIMEON NORTH

MIDDLETOWN, 19 Aug 23

Remarks upon the new contracts proposed for making rifles—Thinks its not drawn according to understanding.

GEORGE BOMFORD ESQR

*Lt Col U States Ordnance Dept*  
Washington DC



## FIRST RIFLE CONTRACTS

---

Further letters from Colonel North to the officials of the War Department, bearing upon the pending contract for rifles, are found in its files, with the endorsements made at the time of their receipt. The most painstaking search of the official files has failed to discover the replies to these letters, which follow in the order of their dates:

COLONEL NORTH TO COLONEL BOMFORD

MIDDLETOWN, CONNT. SEPT. 18th 1823.

SIR

On my return from Washington last spring, I procured a quantity of rifle stocks at Philadelphia, part of which were sawn from seasoned plank. but find from the late instructions from the Ordnance Department to the Inspectors; that no stocks will be received unless they have been sawn from the planks three years. which I find will be impossible for me to procure rifle stocks, of that description, unless I can have them from the Public Armouries. I have lately been at the Public Armoury at Springfield, and find they have a few stocks there, that will answer for the rifle, which are sawed too crooked, for the stocking of muskets, which Mr. Foot, the Master Armourer observed to me, that I could have them, provided I would get an Order from the Ordnance Department for them.

As I am now about ready to commence on the stocking of rifles, if you will have the goodness to favor me with an Order, for what stocks I can pro-

## SIMEON NORTH

---

cure at the Springfield Armoury, which will not  
answer for muskets,

you will favor, & Oblige, Respectfully,  
yr obt & hble. Servt

SIMEON NORTH.

GEO. BOMFORD ESQR.

*Lieut Col. US Ordnance Dept.*

Washington

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### *Endorsement:*

SIMEON NORTH

Middletown 18 Sept, 1823

Has no rifle Stocks answering  
descriptions called for by late  
Regulations.

Ansd 23d

COLONEL NORTH TO COLONEL BOMFORD

MIDDLETOWN CONNT October 29th 1823.

SIR

I have the honor to acknowledge your letter of  
the 20th of this month. Having reflected on the  
subject, will you permit me now to state my views  
with frankness?

From the reference had to Mr. Johnson's supply  
of rifles, in conversing at Washington on the subject  
of a contract prepared for myself, the general impres-  
sion on my mind without any question was, as ex-  
pressed in my letter of August last, that the rifles  
and additional parts to be furnished under the pro-  
posed contract were to correspond with the terms of  
the contract which had been made with Mr. Johnson.



## FIRST RIFLE CONTRACTS

---

It appears however from your letter that you have no recollection of any thing being specified in conversation as to extra limbs or parts to be furnished with the boxes of rifles. And it appears to be judged proper, at the department, that there should be a uniformity of regulation as to contracts for fire arms; to which I cannot but assent, on principle. It also appears that a contract already made for rifles comprehends the conditions proposed for the contract with myself. So strongly do I feel the propriety of having public contracts fairly made without any favoritism, and I am so far from desiring any special favor for myself, that I should not adventure to ask the department to incur the censure of making a difference in price for my benefit, even if I could not conveniently furnish arms of equal goodness on equal terms with the other contractors.

With the capital vested in my establishment and the supplies already provided for making arms there, it is important for myself to have the works employed, if attention and industry will enable me to make the employments beneficial in proportion to the cost. And, considering my situation, I think in this view, that I ought to be able to furnish the government good serviceable firearms on as low terms as any contractor in the United States.

With these sentiments I have now the honor of assenting to the terms of contract as specified in your letter, and request the form of a contract to be prepared and forwarded for signature accordingly. With reference to the rifle stocks as mentioned in your letter on hand at Harper's Ferry, I have now to observe, that I have received some seasoned stocks & expect more from Springfield. When it shall have

## SIMEON NORTH

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been ascertained how many can be furnished from that armoury, I may be able to judge whether it would be requisite for me to obtain any from a place so distant as Harpers ferry.

Respectfully Sir, I am  
yr obt & Hble. servt.

SIMEON NORTH.

GEO. BOMFORD ESQR  
*Lt Col U States Ordnance*

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*Endorsement on back:*

SIMEON NORTH  
Middletown, Cont, Octr 23 1823  
Assents to the terms of a  
Contract proposed to him for  
Rifles  
Ansd 3 Decr  
GEORGE BOMFORD ESQR  
*Lieut Col U States Ordnance Depart*  
Washington City  
D. C.

COLONEL NORTH TO COLONEL BOMFORD

MIDDLETOWN CONN. Decemr 10th 1823

SIR

With your letter of the 3rd of this month, I have received a printed copy of Regulations for the inspection of small arms, and two copies of Contract, for the manufacturing of rifles, which were enclosed.

After attentive examination of the writing expressing the terms of contract, I request permission to say, that I regard the provisional stipulations relative to variations of price and alterations of pattern



## FIRST RIFLE CONTRACTS

---

as very distinctly explicit and as very fair on the part of the department towards the contractor.

Accordingly I have signed the two copies; the blanks for date being first filled with the day and month of my signature. And one of them is now returned.

In answer to the enquiry relative to delivering of rifles before the close of the present year, I have to observe, that the preparations of materials and machinery, the distribution of the branches of work, and the formation of arrangements for proceeding in the business with uniformity and systematic efficiency, have required so much attention and time that I cannot expect to deliver any rifles under the contract within the present month. But the preparations are now so far advanced, and the several branches of the business are now so arranged and in such progress, that I hope to have two hundred rifles completed for inspection in the month of January next.

I have the honor to be  
very respectfully, Sir,  
Your obt. & hble Servt

GEO BOMFORD ESQR

*Lieut Col US Ordnance Dept*  
Washington City

SIMEON NORTH.

With the letter of December 10, in which he waives all previous objections and pronounces the stipulations as to variations of price and alterations of pattern "very fair on the part of the department toward the contractor," Colonel North returned the contract duly signed, and added that his preparations

## SIMEON NORTH

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for manufacture were then so far advanced, and the business "so arranged and in such progress," that he hoped to have two hundred rifles completed for inspection in the following month of January.

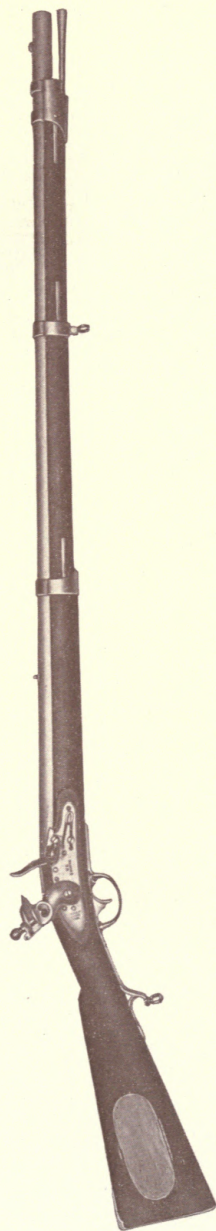
These government contracts, which we have reproduced so freely in these pages, are not particularly interesting reading, but they have a certain historical value, as indicating the successive changes in phraseology adopted by the government, and the gradual approach to greater precision of statement. The rifle contract of 1823 read as follows:

### CONTRACT OF DECEMBER 10, 1823.

THIS AGREEMENT, made this Tenth day of December 1823, between George Bomford, Lieut. Col. of Artillery on Ordnance duty in the Service of the United States, acting with the consent and under the direction of the Honble. John C. Calhoun Secretary of War, of the one part; and Simeon North of Middletown in the State of Connecticut of the other part, WITNESSETH:

*First.*—That the said Simeon North shall manufacture and deliver, for the military service of the United States Six thousand Rifles complete; at the rate of Twelve hundred in each year, for five years, commencing with the first day of July 1823. The Rifles to be manufactured, shall in all their parts, conform in model, size and form, to the pattern or standard model furnished by the Ordnance Depart-





First Rifle. Length  $51\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Length of barrel 36 inches. Caliber, 54. Government standard model.





## FIRST RIFLE CONTRACTS

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ment, and shall be equal in Workmanship and quality, in every respect, to the Arms made at the National Armories during the same period.

*Second.*—It is agreed that the Rifles shall be proved and Inspected by an Officer or person appointed by the Ordnance Department for that purpose, and in the manner prescribed by the regulations which are or may be established by the Ordnance Department. It is understood, however, that no methods of proof or inspection, more rigorous than those established for, and practised at the National Armories of the United States, shall at any time be established. The Rifles are to be proved and inspected at Middletown, and in parcels consisting each of not less than two hundred. The expense of proof and inspection to be defrayed by the United States.

*Third.*—It is agreed that the price of said Rifles, shall be as follows, Viz: For each Rifle complete, including ramrod, and Flint, including also, the proportion of bullet moulds, screw drivers, Wipers, Ball screws, Spring vices, and flint caps, stated in the fourth article of this agreement, the price shall be fourteen dollars and fifty cents. Subject, however, to the following proviso: That if during the period prescribed for the existence of this agreement, the cost of arms at the National Armouries shall be increased or diminished, by the rise or fall of materials or labor, to an amount equal to fifty cents or more on each stand of Arms made; then the price herein stipulated, shall be increased or diminished an equal amount. The new price, if it be lower than is herein stipulated, shall not take effect upon any rifles delivered under this agreement, within three months from and after the time when such reduc-

## SIMEON NORTH

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tion shall have been satisfactorily ascertained: nor, until three months previous notice thereof shall have been given.—But if the new price be higher, it shall take effect upon the first parcel of Rifles delivered, after the increased price has been ascertained and determined.

*Fourth.*—It is agreed that the said Simeon North shall cause the said Rifles to be safely and properly packed for transportation, in good and sufficient boxes, and in the manner which is or may be prescribed by the regulations of the Ordnance Department, and practiced at the National Armouries; each box to contain twenty rifles, with flint and flint caps complete, two bullet moulds, twenty screw drivers, twenty wipers, two ball screws, two spring vices, and twenty spare lead flint caps; and the said Rifles when so packed, shall be delivered at the store of such person in Middletown as may be appointed to receive them. A reasonable price is to be allowed to the said Simeon North for the packing boxes, the cost of which will be ascertained and certified by the U. S. Inspector.

*Fifth.*—It is agreed, that no advances of money shall be required, or made and that the Rifles manufactured and delivered under this agreement shall be paid for on delivery of each parcel, consisting of not less than two hundred complete, at the price stipulated in the third article, and to the full amount of the parcel delivered; not exceeding in any one year, the number Specified in the first article. The vouchers upon which payment will be made, will be, a certificate of the person appointed to inspect the Rifles, and the receipt of the person to whom they were delivered, for the service of the United States.



## FIRST RIFLE CONTRACTS

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*Sixth.*—It is agreed if the United States shall alter or modify the pattern or model Rifle, or establish a model or pattern, at the National Armouries, differing in any respect from that upon which this agreement is founded, then the Rifles to be thereafter manufactured under this agreement shall be made comformable thereto, if it be required by the Ordnance Department.

Provided however, that the said Simeon North shall be allowed a reasonable compensation for any extra expense occasioned by such alteration. And provided also that the amount of such compensation shall be agreed upon and Established before any alteration is made. No deviations from the established pattern will at any time be made, unless expressly directed, in writing, by the Ordnance Department.

*Seventh.*—It is agreed that the United States possess and reserve the right to declare this agreement null and void whenever the said Simeon North shall fail to deliver in any one Year, the number of Rifles stipulated in the first article.

*Eight.*—It is expressly conditioned that no member of Congress is or shall be admitted to any share or part of this contract or agreement or to any benefits to arise thereupon.

In Witness whereof the parties aforesaid have hereunto set their hands, and affixed their seals, the day and year first above written.

Witness present to

the signature of

EDW<sup>p</sup> HULBERT

SIMEON NORTH [SEAL]

To the signature of GEO. BOMFORD Lt. Col. [SEAL]

W. WADE

On Ordnance duty

## SIMEON NORTH

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The letters of Colonel North reproduced in this chapter throw a strong light upon his character. The draft of contract for rifles proposed to him by the department differed in important particulars from the understanding he had gathered from conferences with the authorities at Washington. But he assented to the rule of uniformity of regulation in such contracts, "on principle." Then he added a sentence which we lift from its place in the letter, because it is the key to all his business arrangements with the government for fifty years:

So strongly do I feel the propriety of having public contracts fairly made without any favoritism, and I am so far from desiring any special favor for myself, that I should not adventure to ask the department to incur the censure of making a difference in price for my benefit, even if I could not conveniently furnish arms of equal goodness on equal terms with the other contractors.

There is a whole code of business ethics wrapped up in this sentence, and it was the code that controlled all Colonel North's dealings with his fellowmen. It is a code which some of our business men, in these modern days, seem to have strangely lost sight of!

Colonel North's confidence in his own powers, and the evidence that his business was now



## FIRST RIFLE CONTRACTS

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securely founded, and upon a satisfactory basis, financially and mechanically, are shown in the next sentence of the same letter, in which he assures the Chief of Ordnance that he "ought to be able to furnish the government good serviceable firearms on as low terms as any contractor in the United States."

It was no idle boast. It was his first gun contract. It was a large undertaking. He entered upon it with no cash advance from the government. He agreed to complete the delivery of the 6,000 rifles within five years from the date of the contract. He actually delivered the full number, to the entire satisfaction of the government, one year earlier than had been stipulated. These deliveries were 1,440 in 1824, 1,620 in 1825, 1,440 in 1826, and 1,500 in 1827.

It was an auspicious beginning of his new undertaking, and quite different from what Colonel Wadsworth had anticipated seven years earlier.

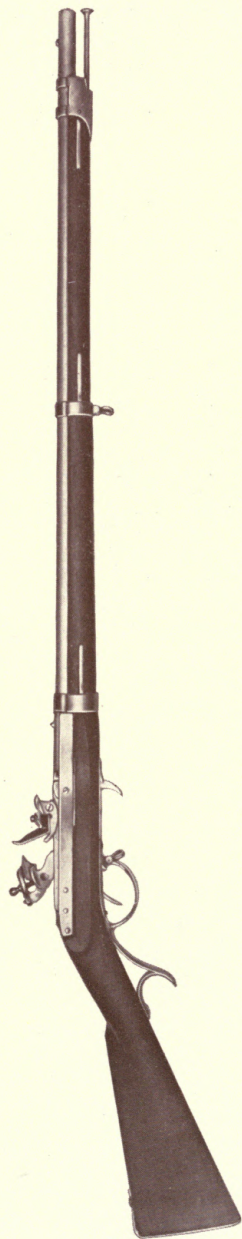
## CHAPTER VIII

### THE LATER RIFLE CONTRACTS—THE HALL BREECH LOADING RIFLE—THE FIRST USE OF STEEL IN BARRELS OF SMALL ARMS—COLONEL NORTH'S LAST OFFICIAL LETTER

**I**T HAS appeared that between the years 1826 and 1828, Colonel North was engaged in manufacturing both pistols and rifles simultaneously. Within a month, he executed two new contracts, one for 1,000 naval pistols (August 18, 1828), and one for 1,200 rifles. This latter contract was dated July 22, 1828; it called for rifles of the standard model, for which \$14.50 each was to be paid, the whole 1,200 to be delivered within one year from the date of the contract. Both of these contracts were satisfactorily executed within the contract period. It is evident that his factory and help were now in most satisfactory condition, enabling the work to move forward with precision and expedition. So much confidence had Colonel North in his ability to turn out the full capacity of his factory, that on December 5 of the same







Hall Rifle. Length  $52\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Length of barrel  $32\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Depth of chamber in receiver  $2\frac{3}{8}$  inches. Caliber, 54. Harper's Ferry model.



## HALL RIFLE CONTRACTS

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year he entered into a third and much larger contract. This was his first contract for the manufacture of what was known as the Hall rifle.

It was for 5,000 rifles, to be delivered at the rate of 1,000 per annum, price \$17.50 each. This contract is notable for its explicit requirements regarding the "perfect uniformity of the respective component parts," and is worth quoting for that reason:

### CONTRACT OF DECEMBER 15, 1828

THIS AGREEMENT, made this fifteenth day of December, one thousand eight hundred and twenty eight, between George Bomford Brevet Colonel of Artillery on Ordnance duty, in the service of the United States, acting with the consent and under the direction of the Hon. Peter B. Porter, Secretary of War, of the one part, and Simeon North of Middletown, in the State of Connecticut, of the other part, WITNESSETH:

*First.* That the said Simeon North shall manufacture and deliver, for the military service of the United States, five thousand Halls rifles, with Bayonets and Ramrods complete; at the rate of one thousand in each year, for five years, commencing with the first day of July in the year one thousand eight hundred and twenty nine. The rifles to be manufactured shall, in all their parts, conform in model, size, and form, to the pattern or model rifle, furnished by the Ordnance Department, and shall be equal in

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workmanship and quality, in every respect, to the same description of rifles made at the National Armories during the same period. And it is further agreed, that the said rifles shall have that perfect uniformity of their respective component parts, that any one part, or all parts of either, or any one of the rifles, may be exchanged for its corresponding part or parts, in either or any other rifle, made or to be made under this agreement. And also, that the component parts may be exchanged in a similar manner, with the rifles made, or making, at the National Armory. The said exchanges to be made without impairing in the least the efficiency or perfection of the Arms, which are thus composed of exchanging parts.

*Second.* It is agreed that the rifles shall be proved and inspected by an officer or person appointed by the Ordnance Department for that purpose, and in the manner prescribed by the regulations which are or may be established by the Ordnance Department. It is understood, however, that no methods of proof or inspection, more rigorous than those established for, and practiced at the National Armories of the United States, shall at any time be established. The rifles are to be proved and inspected at or near Middletown, and in parcels consisting each of not less than two hundred. The expense of proof and inspection to be defrayed by the United States.

*Third.* It is agreed that the price of the rifles to be manufactured, shall be as follows, viz.: For each rifle complete, including bayonet, ramrod, and flint, including also, the proportion of the bullet moulds, screw drivers, wipers and spring vices, stated in the fourth article of this agreement, the price shall be seventeen dollars and fifty cents.



## HALL RIFLE CONTRACTS

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*Fourth.* It is agreed that the said Simeon North, shall cause the said rifles to be safely and properly packed for transportation, in good and sufficient boxes, and in the manner which is or may be prescribed by the regulations of the Ordnance Department, and practiced at the National Armories: each box to contain twenty rifles complete, two bullet moulds, twenty screw drivers, twenty wipers, and two spring vices; and the said rifles when so packed, shall be delivered at such store in Middletown, as may be designated by the Ordnance Department.— A reasonable price is to be allowed by the United States, to the said Simeon North for the packing boxes, the cost of which is to be ascertained and certified by the Inspector.

*Fifth.* It is agreed, that the rifles manufactured and delivered under this agreement, shall be paid for on delivery of each parcel, consisting of not less than two hundred, at the price stipulated in third article, and to the full amount of the parcel delivered. The vouchers upon which payment will be made, will be, a certificate of the person appointed to inspect the Arms, and the receipt of the person to whom they were delivered, for the service of the United States. It is understood, however, that the rifles may be delivered at such times within the period stated in the first article, as may be preferred by the contractor.

*Sixth.* It is agreed, that if the United States shall alter or modify the pattern or model rifle, or establish a model or pattern, at the National Armories, differing in any respect from that upon which this agreement is founded, then the Arms to be thereafter manufactured under this agreement shall be made conformable thereto, if it be required by the

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Ordnance Department. Provided however, that the said Simeon North, shall be allowed a reasonable compensation for any extra expense occasioned by such alteration, And Provided also, that the amount of such compensation shall be agreed upon and established before any alteration is made. And it is to be understood, that no deviations from the established pattern will at any time be made, unless expressly directed, in writing, by the Ordnance Department.

*Seventh.* It is expressly conditioned that no member of Congress is or shall be admitted to any share or part of this contract or agreement, or to any benefit to arise thereupon.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties aforesaid have hereunto set their hands and affixed their seals, the day and year first above written.

Witness present

W. KIDDALL      GEO. BOMFORD *B. Col.* [SEAL]  
    On Ordnance service  
    SIMEON NORTH [SEAL]

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### *Prices in detail.*

Rifles complete. . . . .	each		\$17.20
Bullet-moulds 30 Cents	“	one tenth of	
		which is	.03
Screw drivers	6½ ¢	“	.06½
Wipers . . . . .	18½ ¢	“	.18½
Spring vices.	20 ¢	one tenth of	
		which is	.02
			<hr/>
			\$17.50



## HALL RIFLE CONTRACTS

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Mr. Hall does not appear to have been at all pleased that the government had entered into a contract with any other armorer than himself for the manufacture of guns covered by his patent. Before any of the North rifles had been delivered, he wrote a letter to Colonel Bomford, of the Ordnance Bureau, who had executed the contract, in which he expressed his dissatisfaction in vigorous language. To make this record as complete as possible, we find pleasure in quoting Mr. Hall's letter in full:

MR. HALL TO COLONEL BOMFORD

HARPER'S FERRY 26 July, 1830.

COL. GEORGE BOMFORD.

SIR:

I have received a letter from Mr. Dudley who is inspecting the Hall's rifles made by Col. North at Middletown, from the tenor of which I have become apprehensive that he has been induced since his arrival there, to adopt the pernicious error that the arms may be accepted with some innovations in them and deviations from the model. Perceiving the dangerous tendency of such an error I immediately wrote to Mr. Dudley in a manner calculated to eradicate from his mind an opinion so fatal to the success of the great object in view, which has so far been prosecuted with success—protesting against the admission of innovations, by Col. North, in the arms, of any kind whatever—and against the acceptance of any rifle the component parts of which will not, all, with-

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out exception, exchange with *all* the Hall's Rifles, all that Col. North makes as well as with those made here—fitting well to all of them. But I fear that my letter may not arrive at Middletown before Mr. D's departure from it, and may therefore fail of producing its intended effect. If this should prove to be the case I would suggest to you, Sir, as a proper precaution against the admission and establishment of a precedent that will prove destructive to the success of the great object for the accomplishment of which such an amount of time and money has been expended,—that, previous to the acceptance of the Rifles by the Ordnance Department, a portion of them should be sent on to me at this place, for my examination, the more the better.

If irregularities of any kind should once be permitted in the construction of the arms it will prove utterly subversive of the utility of the plan now in successful operation, at this place. One inspector will admit of one kind of variation in one or more parts of one parcel. The same or another inspector will admit, at another time, another kind of difference in another part of another parcel, &c., &c., &c., until at length all the irregularities for the prevention of which such long continued and incessant exactions have been made will come to be admitted—one parcel of the arms one kind of fault—in another parcel another kind of fault &c., &c., and in all the parcels numerous faults—Consequently when brought together into one parcel as many faults would be found to exist among them all as are to be found in other arms and the Rifles would prove to be on a par, as to the utility of their similarity, with a common musket. From such Rifles when distributed in service and injured there



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it would prove impossible to construct good arms from the uninjured parts of damaged ones, merely by combining them without *alterations*. On the contrary it would become necessary either to throw aside the injured rifles, wholly, as is now done with muskets in service or to attempt fitting and adjusting their dissimilar parts to each other with a certainty of either failing in the attempt or of losing much time in making it, and perhaps at a period and under circumstances in which even the loss of a few moments might prove a serious injury to our country—and also with a strong probability if successful in making the adjustment in any length of time of rendering “confusion worse confounded” by it for it would be quite as likely to happen that in adjusting two parts to each other, the right one would get altered and be made to conform to the wrong one as that the latter would be altered and made to conform to the right one.

The vital importance, to this business of rigidly enforcing the rule that none of the rifles shall be accepted but those the component parts of which will *all* exchange with *all* the Rifles—those made here as well as those made elsewhere for the U. S. Government, and the certain destruction of the utility of the whole plan if the departure from that rule is permitted, in any case whatever, in conjunction with the apparent danger of such a departure at this time renders me extremely anxious that an effectual remedy should be provided against it, and effectual precautions taken to insure its strict observance at all times.

Respectfully I am Sir

Your obedient Servant

JOHN H. HALL.

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On August 1, 1830, Colonel Bomford replied to this in the following terms:

ORDNANCE OFFICE, WASHINGTON,  
August 1, 1830.

MR. J. H. HALL,  
Harper's Ferry.

SIR:

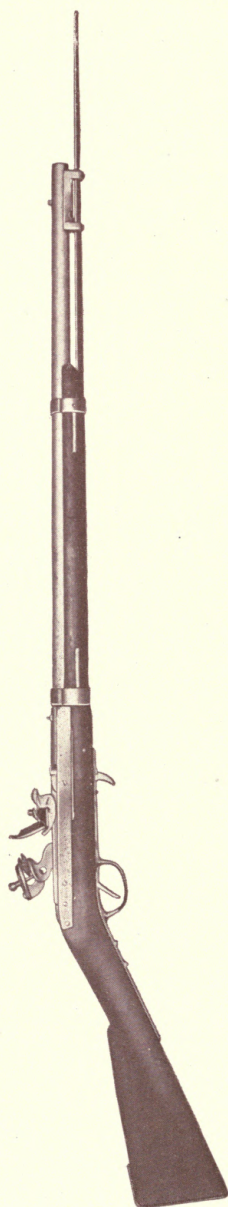
Prior to yours of the 26th ult I had received a letter from Mr. Dudley on the same subject. The only point in which Mr. North's work did not conform to the regulations, as stated by Mr. Dudley, was the bayonet in some instances rested on the *stud* instead of the end of the stock. And that this defect did not interfere in the least with the free exchange of the bayonets nor render the arm less efficient. Mr. Dudley stated also that one of the models was not quite perfect in this respect and that the rifles would probably have been correct in this particular had Mr. North been furnished with the regulations for inspecting in the commencement of his work. Under the circumstances Mr. Dudley was authorized to receive the parcel, but with the express understanding that the case should not form a precedent for future inspections. As the contractor is now in possession of the regulations, there can be no excuse for not adhering to them in future. I have ordered half of the parcel received to be forwarded to this city with a view of their being sent to the armory for your examination.

Respectfully, etc.,

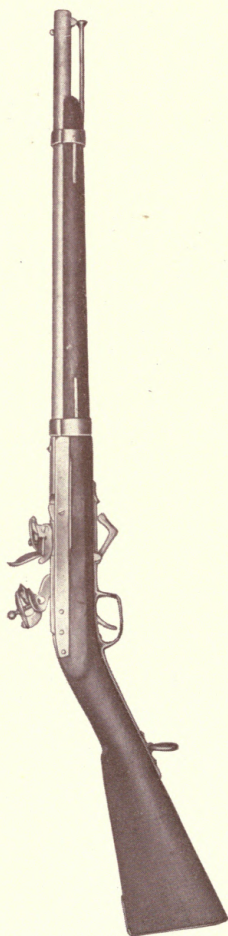
G. BOMFORD, *Brevet Colonel*  
*on Ordnance Service.*



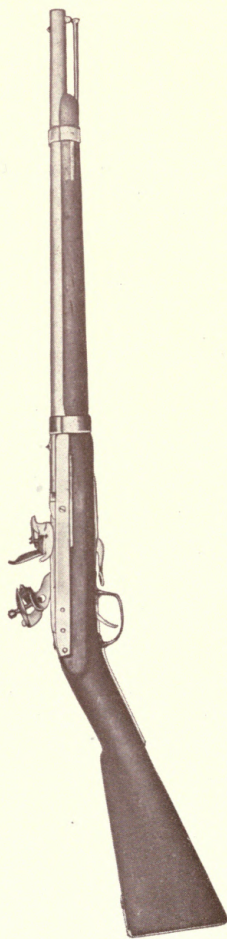




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2.

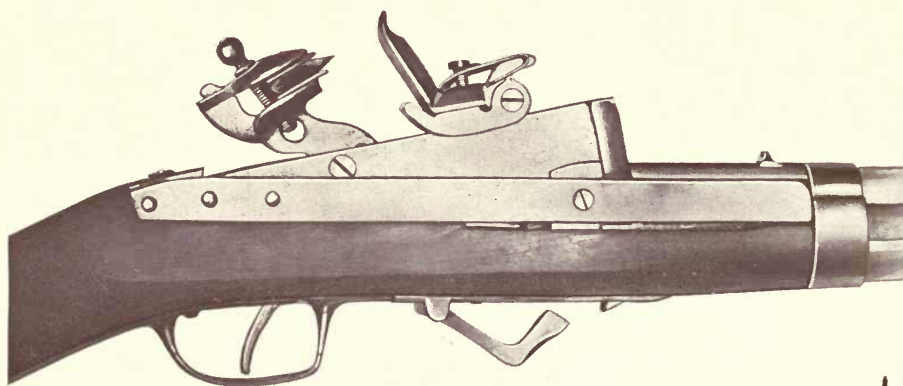
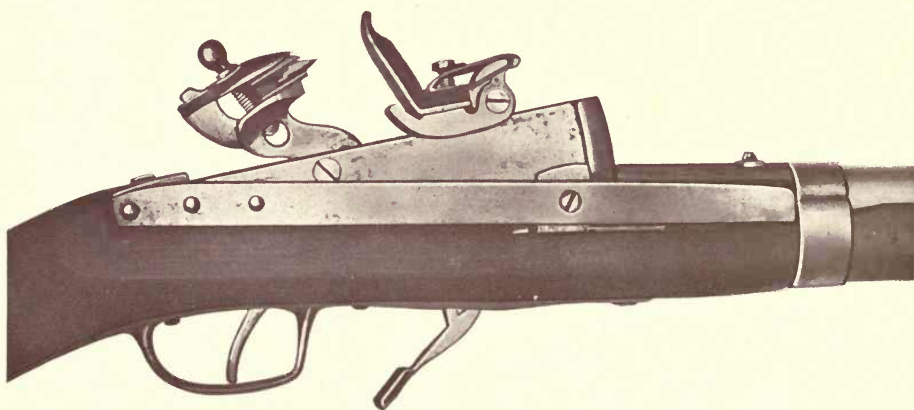
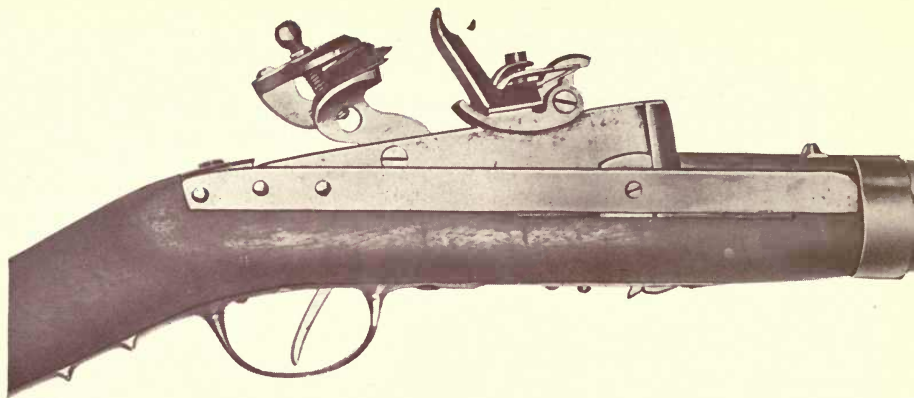


3.

Hall Carbines. 1833 to 1843. (1): Length 45 inches. Length of barrel 26 inches. Depth of chamber in receiver  $2\frac{3}{8}$  inches. Caliber, 54. Patch box on underside of stock. Ramrod bayonet extending  $21\frac{1}{2}$  inches. (2 and 3): Same general model, varying in minor details, and having different means of operating receiver. Length 40 inches. Length of barrel 21 inches.







Different means of operating receiver of guns illustrated in 'previous plate.



## HALL RIFLE CONTRACTS

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It is thus made plain that if any deviation from the model furnished was found in Colonel North's rifles, it was due to a defect in the model itself, and to a failure to furnish him with a copy of the inspection regulations. All of the rifles delivered under this contract were accepted, and the complete satisfaction of the government officials with the arms he was furnishing is proven by the fact that in 1833, while the rifle contract was still running, he was awarded a contract for 1,000 carbines for dragoons, at \$20 each. The guns under this contract were evidently wanted in a hurry, as the first delivery was made in January, 1834, and the last in May of the same year. In the "Contract Statement" book of the Ordnance Department we find the following entries of assignments or orders for arms, under former contracts:

January 27, 1835—4,000 rifles;

November 23, 1835, and January 6, 1836, orders for carbines—the number ordered not being stated.

June 20, 1836, a contract was executed for 2,500 carbines, with bayonets complete, the same to be delivered with all accompanying parts on or before December 31, 1837, at the price of \$18 each.

Except as to date and price, and minor specifications, this contract is a duplicate of the one

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last quoted. It is probable that this was the gun with the ramrod bayonet. It is impossible to determine accurately the number of Hall guns made by Colonel North, between the date of his first contract in 1828 and his last contract of May 22, 1839; but we find in the day book of Reuben North, charges for making forgings for 14,322 receivers, and a corresponding number of other parts. As these forgings were all made between November, 1829 and June, 1839, it is probable that he had received orders for not less than 15,000 rifles and carbines, prior to the contract of 1839.

The long period during which Colonel North was engaged in the manufacture of this particular arm [1828-1852] justifies some reference to its manufacture at Harper's Ferry under Hall and at Middletown under contract with Colonel North. Especial interest surrounds the operations of Colonel North and Captain Hall in view of the opinion held by many (Captain Hall included) that Captain Hall was the first manufacturer to produce arms with uniform parts. Captain Hall's patent was granted him in 1811, and his gun was first brought to the attention of the government in 1813. General Armstrong, then Secretary of War, ordered a few guns for



## HALL RIFLE CONTRACTS

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trial in that year, and in 1816 samples were again presented. In January, 1817, a contract for 100 guns was made, with a view of arming a company of riflemen by way of experiment.

The report of the officer receiving these guns was so favorable that Captain Hall was sent to one of the public armories (presumably Harper's Ferry) to improve the model and make further experiments. Four guns were made and tested with such satisfactory results that on March 19, 1819, after several years of persistent effort, Captain Hall finally succeeded in making a contract with the government, under which it was agreed that the United States should have the right, upon payment of \$1,000 royalty, to manufacture at one of the public armories 1,000 rifles, under the Hall patent. It was also agreed that Hall should be employed to superintend the work at a salary of \$60 per month, with the title of assistant armorer. Harper's Ferry was selected as the place for their manufacture.

A report to the Secretary of War by Colonel Bomford, dated January 31, 1827, states that work was started on the rifles in May, 1819. It was a part of Captain Hall's plan, that the guns should be made with interchangeable parts, which he proceeded to carry out by devising

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and building special machines and tools, many of which he patented.

The first 1,000 rifles were not completed until 1825, when another 1,000 were undertaken, on the same terms as before. In this same report of January 31, 1827, Colonel Bomford stated that the second 1,000 rifles were not yet completed. He further says that the cost of machinery and tools for the manufacture of the rifles had at that time amounted to \$57,076.82, and that the cost of the arms was \$20.59 each for the first 1,000, and that the second 1,000 were expected to cost \$14.92 each. This estimate of cost was evidently based upon labor and material only, as in his report for 1836, when the plant was complete in every detail, he states the cost of manufacture, including interest on investment, to have been \$21.13 for each gun. Three commissioners, appointed by Colonel Bomford to examine the machinery used by Hall, submitted a detailed report, on January 6, 1827, expressing themselves as highly pleased with the results produced with Captain Hall's machinery. The commissioners and Colonel Bomford, judging by the tenor of their respective reports, were apparently of the opinion that arms had never before been constructed with interchangeable



## HALL RIFLE CONTRACTS

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parts. We quote from Colonel Bomford's report of January 31:

The machinery used in the fabrication of these rifles has been constructed on a new and improved plan, by which a very important improvement in the fabrication of firearms has been effected. By the aid of this machinery, each of the various separate parts which, when united, form one arm, are constructed in that perfectly accurate and uniform manner that any one of the parts of one arm will fit exactly the corresponding part of any other arm of similar model. And this perfection is accomplished at a less expense than is occasioned by the use of the ordinary machinery in executing work in the usual and less perfect manner. This degree of perfection in the fabrication of small arms has ever been considered an object of the highest importance in all national armories, and has been frequently attempted in the armories of Europe, but without success. And the attempt has been generally abandoned from the belief that the object was unattainable.

Colonel Bomford had evidently lost sight of the fact that fourteen years previous to the date of this report, Colonel North had carried into effect a complete system of duplication of parts, and had subsequently contracted for and delivered more than 40,000 pistols embodying the principle.

It seems strange that Colonel Bomford should have so completely misstated the facts, as it was

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with his approval that the 1813 contract of Simeon North was extended and so modified as to include interchangeability in the locks. He must have been aware,—and have forgotten,—that uniformity of parts had already been successfully accomplished, though not in a “national armory.” Less than three months prior to the date of the report quoted above, Colonel North contracted for 1,000 naval pistols to be made in duplicate. If Colonel Bomford had forgotten what had already been accomplished at the North factory, his memory must have received a rude awakening, when, the following year, Colonel North offered to substitute Hall rifles for muskets in his contract, and make them interchangeable in every respect with those made at Harper’s Ferry. A contract was closed for 5,000 Hall rifles and the guns were delivered in accordance with the specifications, and without any allowance from the United States for machinery, which is satisfactory evidence that his plant was already adapted to manufacture arms with uniform parts.

At the time of his death, in 1841, Captain Hall had received \$20,220 in royalties on his machinery patents, and an Ordnance Report of 1837 fixes the cost of the plant at \$149,410.79.



## HALL RIFLE CONTRACTS

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Regarding the relative cost of guns made at Harper's Ferry and at Colonel North's factory, Colonel Bomford, on February 8, 1836, in reply to a letter from Hon. John I. McKay, of the House Committee on Military Affairs, states that 970 guns made at Harper's Ferry, in 1834, cost, including interest on investment, \$21.13 each. He summarizes as follows: "Thus the 970 rifles cost \$20,503.85, or \$21.13 per stand, and the contract price with Colonel North being \$17.20, there appears thus far to have been no saving." The above statement would seem to demonstrate that Colonel North's plant was in every respect equal if not superior to that at Harper's Ferry, as otherwise he could not have turned out for \$17.20, guns (interchangeable with those made at Harper's Ferry) that cost \$21.13 at the National Armory, and at the same time realized a profit.

We devote so much space to the history of the manufacture of the Hall gun, not to criticize the operations at Harper's Ferry, but to more clearly demonstrate the fact that Simeon North, years before work was started on the Hall gun, had developed a complete system of duplication of parts, and at his own risk and cost, so that when the opportunity offered, in 1828, he was in position to contract for 5,000 Hall rifles inter-

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changeable in every respect with those made at Harper's Ferry.

On May 2, 1839, a contract was awarded Colonel North for 10,000 Hall carbines, to be delivered at the rate of 2,000 per year at the price of \$18 each. This contract was based upon certain recommendations made by Colonel North for improvements in the Hall carbine, a memorandum of which is found in the War Department files, reading as follows:

*Memorandum of improvements made by Colonel Simeon North, on Captain Hall's New patent Carbine; viz:*

- 1st. The box plate opens and shuts with a double spring & falling quite back on the stud. The breech containing also, besides the usual recesses for the appendages, one termed "the grease box."
- 2nd. The catch and guard plate are united in one giving thereby additional strength to the stock.
- 3rd. There is also a decided improvement in the arrangement in throwing open the receiver. The hook coming in contact with the shoulder being dispensed with.
- 4th. The apron is improved by having the stop permanently fastened to it, instead of to the barrel; preventing thereby the loss of the stop.
- 5th. The stock is increased in size.
- 6th. An alteration in the spring vice, having but one screw instead of two.
- 7th. He proposes also to increase the chock screws to resist the shock of the recoil—making the body of the screw the same size as the head now is.



## HALL RIFLE CONTRACTS

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The patch box here recommended does not appear to have been finally adopted, as no Hall gun is known to exist having any recess in the breech for appendages, except the gun with the sliding bayonet, and there it is on the under side of the stock, and the cover is a continuation of the guard plate.

As this was the last contract awarded Colonel North we produce it in full:

### CONTRACT OF MAY 2, 1839

This agreement made this twenty second day of May 1839 between George Talcott Lieut. Colonel of Ordnance in the service of the United States, acting with the consent and under the direction of the Hon. I. R. Poinsett Secretary of War, of the one part, and Simeon North of Middletown, State of Connecticut, of the other part, WITNESSETH,

*First.* That the said Simeon North shall manufacture and deliver for the Military Service of the United States, Ten Thousand Hall's Carbines with bayonets complete, at the rate of two thousand of the aforesaid carbines in each year for five years, commencing with the first day of Jan.<sup>y</sup> 1840, the United States reserving the right of annulling this contract at any time after the expiration of three years, on giving six months' notice to that effect.

The Carbines to be manufactured shall in all their parts, conform in model, size and form to the pattern or model carbine furnished by the Ordnance Depart-

## SIMEON NORTH

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ment, and shall be equal in workmanship and quality in every respect to the aforesaid model Carbine. And it is further agreed that the said Carbine shall have that perfect uniformity of their respective component parts, that any one part, or all their parts, of either, or any one of the Carbines, may be exchanged for its corresponding part or parts, in either or any other Carbine made or to be made under this agreement. The said exchanges to be made without impairing in the least the efficiency or the perfection of the arms which are thus composed of exchanged parts.

*Second.* It is agreed that the carbines shall be proved and inspected by an Officer or person appointed by the Ordnance Department for the purpose and in the manner prescribed by the regulations which are or may be established by the Ordnance Department. The said inspecting officer shall be the sole judge as well of the pattern as of the workmanship, material, & solidity and temper of said carbines. It is understood however that no methods of proof or inspection more rigorous than those established for and practised at the National Armories of the United States shall at any time be established. The Carbines are to be proved and inspected at or near Middletown, Connecticut, and in parcels not less than 500. The expenses of proof inspection to be defrayed by the United States.

*Third.* It is agreed that the price of the Carbines to be manufactured shall be as follows; viz: For each carbine complete, including bayonet, screw driver & wiper also the proportion of bullet & buck shot moulds, &c, viz: two bullet & buck shot moulds and two spring vices to every twenty carbines, the price shall be eighteen dollars.



## HALL RIFLE CONTRACTS

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*Fourth.* It is agreed that the said Simeon North shall cause the said carbines to be safely and properly packed for transportation in good and sufficient boxes and in the manner which is or may be prescribed by the regulations of the Ordnance Department, and practised at the National Armories—each box to contain 20 carbines, and the said carbines when so packed shall be delivered at such store in Middletown as may be designated by the Ordnance Department: a reasonable price to be allowed by the United States to the said Simeon North for the packing boxes, the cost of which is to be ascertained and certified by the Inspector.

*Fifth.* It is agreed that the Carbines manufactured and delivered under this agreement shall be paid for on delivery of each parcel, consisting of not less than five hundred at the price stipulated in the third article of this agreement and to the full amount of the parcel delivered. The vouchers upon which payment will be made, will be a certificate of the person appointed to inspect the carbines, and the receipt of the person to whom they were delivered for the Service of the United States.

*Sixth.* It is agreed that if the United States shall alter or modify the pattern or model Carbine, or establish a model or pattern differing in any respect from that upon which this agreement is founded, except such modifications as have been already made in a carbine exhibited at the Ordnance Office, a specification of which alterations is annexed hereto, and also the further alteration of rifling the barrel if so directed, then the Carbines to be hereafter manufactured under this agreement, shall be made conformable thereto, if it be required by the Ordnance

## SIMEON NORTH

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Department, Provided, however, that the said Simeon North shall be allowed a reasonable compensation for any extra expense occasioned by such alteration and, provided also, that the amount of such compensation shall be agreed upon and established before any such alteration is made: and it is to be understood that no deviations from the established pattern will at any time be made, unless expressly directed in writing by the Ordnance Department.

*Seventh.* It is expressly conditioned that no member of Congress is or shall be admitted to any share or part of this contract or agreement or to any benefit to arise thereupon.

In witness whereof the parties aforesaid have hereunto set their hands and affixed their seals the day and year first above written.

The words wiper and buckshot in the twelfth and buckshot in the eleventh line from the bottom of second page interlined before signing.

Witness

(Names not legible)

G. TALCOTT [SEAL]

*L. Col. Ord.*

SIMEON NORTH [SEAL]

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*The within contract is respectfully submitted to the  
Hon. Secretary of War for his approval.*

Ord. Office }  
22<sup>d</sup> May 1839 }

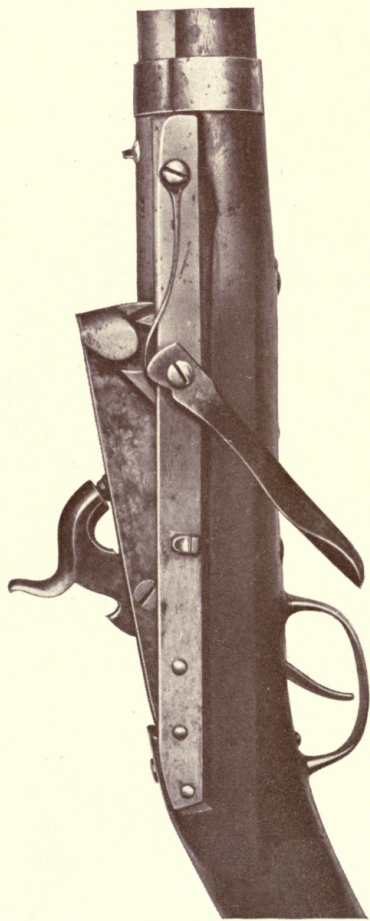
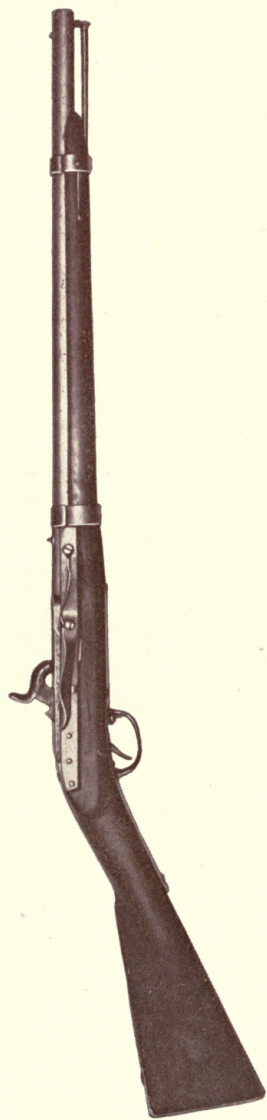
G. TALCOTT  
*L. Col. Ord.*

Approved

I. R. POINSETT  
[ 178 ]







Hall Carbine. 1843 to 1852. Known as "North's Improvement." Length 40 inches. Length of barrel 21 inches. Caliber, 54.

North's improved method of operating the receiver.



## HALL RIFLE CONTRACTS

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So satisfactory were the relations between the government and Colonel North under this contract, so effective were the arms made with his improvements, that the contract was continued in force from year to year, and the armorer continued to receive orders on account of it until his death, in 1852. He manufactured in all 18,000 carbines under this contract. The last order received by him was dated February 5, 1850, and was for 3,000 guns.

In the meanwhile numerous modifications were made in the carbine, in accordance with further suggestions of Colonel North.

On February 10, 1843, while in Washington, Colonel North submitted a new model of carbine embodying what is known as North's Improvement. This improvement included a side lever, a closer contact between barrel and receiver and various other changes, all of which tended to make a better and less expensive arm. After being tested by the Ordnance Department, the changes were adopted, and all Hall guns thereafter made by Colonel North followed the new pattern.

The letter accepting this improvement in the model was as follows:

## SIMEON NORTH

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COLONEL TALCOTT TO COLONEL NORTH

*Modification of 1839 Contract.*

*See memo. attached to contract.*

ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON,  
February 18, 1843.

S. NORTH

SIR:

In answer to your letter to the Secretary of War of the 10th inst on the subject of continuing your contract and furnishing this Department with carbines of a new pattern, the following propositions are made to you, viz:

(1) There being 1500 carbines to be delivered in the first half of the present year, 500 of them shall be of the new pattern.

(2) On the revival of the contract heretofore ordered to cease, there will be 3,000 carbines to be furnished and it is proposed to extend the time of delivering them to the first day of July 1846, in parcels of 500 each six months, all of them to be of the new pattern.

(3) The present price of the carbines is to be reduced \$1. on all that are furnished of the new pattern.

You will be pleased to signify your acceptance or non-acceptance of this proposition.

I am,

Yours respectfully,

G. TALCOTT,

*Lieutenant Colonel Ordnance.*

To this letter Colonel North, who was then in Washington, filed the following reply:



## HALL RIFLE CONTRACTS

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COLONEL NORTH TO COLONEL TALCOTT

*(Modification 1839 Contract)*

WASHINGTON, February 18, 1843.

COL. G. TALCOTT,  
Ordnance Department.

SIR:

I have received your letter of this day, making certain propositions to me on the subject of furnishing your Department with carbines of a new pattern in continuation of my contract heretofore ordered to cease, which are hereby accepted.

I am, respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

SIMEON NORTH.

The memorandum attached to the amended contract reads as follows:

MEMORANDUM from Statement of Contracts No. 7-2. Revision of Contract, 1839.

In consequence of a proposition made by Colonel North in his letter to the Secretary of War of February 11, 1843. (See War Department No. 35 Book 13.) His contract for carbines has been modified as follows; viz:

1. He is authorized to deliver 1,000 of the present pattern,—500 of an improved pattern as established by him in the course of the year 1843.

2. The delivery of the remaining 3,000 to be extended to July 1, 1846, in parcels of 500 each six months, and all of them to be of new pattern.

3. The present price of carbines to be reduced \$1. on all that are furnished of the new pattern (see War Department No. 35, Book 13, which shows all the particulars in reference to the change in the contract.)

## SIMEON NORTH

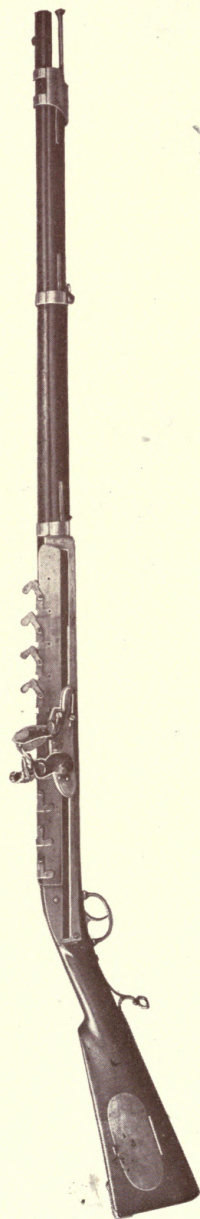
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A patent was issued to Simeon North and Edward Savage, on July 30, 1844, covering the above changes, which came to be known as "the North Improvement." It is inferred that this patent was taken out to protect the interests of Mr. Savage, to whom Colonel North probably paid a small royalty. We are led to this inference by the fact that Colonel North never sought patents on improvements or inventions originating with him or in his factory, either on machinery, tools or arms. This was eminently characteristic of him. He preferred to give the government the benefit of all the improvements he devised, desiring only that his works should be kept busy in the meanwhile. There can be no question that had he patented all the tools and machines which were first thought out and constructed in his shops, to facilitate, expedite and cheapen the arms he was making for the government, he would have become the possessor of a very large fortune from that source alone. Many of these improvements, or modifications of the basic principles of them, are in use to this day.

A tangible evidence of his inventive mind were several models of repeating guns, one of which is now in the possession of the National Museum at Washington. The collection of arms owned







Multi-charge Repeating Rifle. Made in 1825.



## HALL RIFLE CONTRACTS

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by the Winchester Repeating Arms Company, of New Haven, Conn., includes a very interesting multi-charge repeating rifle, made by Colonel North in 1825. This gun is made to fire ten charges without reloading. It loads from the muzzle, the cartridges following each other until the whole ten are rammed home. The side of the barrel is perforated by ten primer holes which are protected with thin steel covers. The lock is enclosed in a steel case and runs in a steel groove on the under side of the barrel; in firing it is pushed forward to the first charge and the primer pan filled from a chamber on the back side of the lock, holding sufficient powder to prime for the ten shots. After the first charge is fired, the lock is pulled back to the second charge, and so on until all the charges are fired. The length of gun over all is  $56\frac{3}{4}$  inches; length of barrel  $41\frac{3}{4}$  inches; length of stock and forearm, which is one piece,  $53\frac{3}{4}$  inches; caliber, 54. The barrel is octagonal in shape for 16 inches from the breech and round from that point to the muzzle. On the lock plate is stamped "S. North, Middletown, Conn., 1825," and the same date appears on the breech of the barrel. It is very carefully made, and finely finished. Whether it was submitted for govern-

## SIMEON NORTH

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ment approval, we do not know, but if so, the verdict was doubtless unfavorable, as none were ever made for the service. A number of these rifles were made and sold at private sale, and were doubtless used by sportsmen.

As an illustration of the suggestions he was constantly making, not only to overcome his own difficulties, but to benefit the government by improving his product, the following correspondence is submitted. It is difficult to believe that the government should have waited until 1848 before using steel instead of iron in its gun barrels:

COLONEL NORTH TO COLONEL TALCOTT

MIDDLETOWN, CON<sup>T</sup>

July 11th, 1848.

GEORGE TALCOTT, Esq.,

*Col. of Ordnance.*

SIR:

I find it difficult to procure Iron for the Carbine barrels that is free from dirt and cinders and we lose nearly one-half of the Barrels.

The last Inspection completed on the 6th Inst we had 628 Barrels welded to obtain 300 Received by the Inspector. And after the Inspection of the Barrels we now have in the works we respectfully Request that the Department will give us the privilege of Making the barrels for the Carbines with *cast steel*.

I have the honor to be

Sir, With high respect

Your obedient Serv<sup>t</sup>

SIMEON NORTH.



## HALL RIFLE CONTRACTS

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COLONEL TALCOTT TO COLONEL NORTH

ORDNANCE OFFICE, WASHINGTON,

14th of July, 1848.

COLONEL SIMEON NORTH,  
Middletown, Connecticut.

SIR:

Your letter of the 11th inst requesting to be allowed to use cast steel for barrels of carbines has been received. I have no doubt that cast steel well annealed [to make the drilling easy] will give you better barrels more serviceable and taking into view the loss in the iron barrels at a less cost than iron. You are, therefore, authorized to use cast steel for barrels for the remainder of the carbines to be delivered unless otherwise notified from this office, provided that no increase of price is charged for the finished arms.

I am, Sir, etc.,

G. TALCOTT,  
*Colonel of Ordnance.*

This correspondence opens up another interesting chapter in the development of the small arms manufacture in the United States. It is well known that heavy and constant loss was incurred by the early arms manufacturers, by the use of iron in their barrels. The material was poor and unequal in quality, and many barrels failed on the proving test in consequence. It is not at all certain that Colonel North was the first manufacturer to substitute steel for

iron in the barrel of government arms, although the above correspondence, taken in connection with other records of the Ordnance Bureau, would seem to indicate that such was the case. It is stated in the Ordnance Reports that on January 27, 1845, Samuel Remington, of E. Remington & Son, wrote the Secretary of War requesting that his cast steel barrel be submitted to a board of officers, about to convene, and that they be directed to report on the practicability of adopting steel in place of iron for the barrels of all small arms. The matter was referred to the board, the subject was considered, and a report followed favoring the use of steel. No further action appears to have been taken until August 31, 1848, when Colonel Talcott submitted to the Secretary of War the following recommendations of the Ordnance board, adopted at a meeting on June 19, advising that steel be used in place of iron for rifle barrels:

The cost of materials for a barrel of iron is about 72 cents, for a barrel of steel \$1.70. In the workmanship of steel barrels there is a saving that must nearly compensate for this greater cost of material. Boring steel barrels is less expensive than reaming iron ones, because the machines for drilling feed themselves, and one man may attend to several. All the steel barrels, nearly, would pass inspection, and conse-



## HALL RIFLE CONTRACTS

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quently no loss. Of iron barrels there is a considerable loss in manufacturing. From these circumstances it is believed that cast steel barrels do not cost more than iron ones; but as a change would require new machines for boring, etc., an allowance as asked by Mr. Whitney on, say, 2,000 barrels, to allow him to complete his contract for iron barrels, might very justly be made.

The board would recommend the adoption of cast steel barrels for rifles, which, from experiments, are shown to possess superior strength, smoothness, and stiffness to iron.

Colonel North's letter of July 11, quoted page 184 asking permission to substitute steel for iron, was written more than a month prior to Colonel Talcott's report; and it may be noted that he asked no allowance for the expense involved in making the change.

The first contract between E. Remington & Son and the government that we have been able to trace was made in 1845, when they took over a contract, made in 1842, with John Griffiths of Cincinnati, for 5,000 rifles. The first delivery under this contract was on April 5, 1850. So that while Remington is entitled to the credit of having first suggested the use of steel in government arms, Colonel North was first of the old established armorers to adopt it, and was before Remington & Son in the actual delivery

## SIMEON NORTH

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of steel barreled guns. There is no means of ascertaining whether Colonel North was aware of Remington's suggestion, when he requested permission to use steel.

On receipt of Colonel Talcott's letter of July 14, 1848, Colonel North at once took the necessary steps to adapt his plant to the manufacture of steel barrels, and upon the completion of those then in process, he substituted steel, and never made any more iron barrels. In December of the same year, he made the first delivery of carbines having steel barrels.

The change in manufacture which the Ordnance officers were so desirous of consummating, was made so quietly, that when writing Colonel North a year and a half later in regard to a new model gun, Colonel Talcott had apparently forgotten that it had already been effected. It seems strange that the Colonel of Ordnance should not have known that Simeon North had been delivering steel barreled carbines for more than a year. His oversight may have been due to Colonel North's characteristic habit of doing things and saying nothing about them. In his reply to Colonel Talcott he makes no mention of the fact that he was at that time using steel in his barrels, probably assuming that under the



## HALL RIFLE CONTRACTS

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pressure of business, Colonel Talcott had lost sight of the fact.

COLONEL TALCOTT TO COLONEL NORTH.

ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON,  
February 5, 1850.

COLONEL SIMEON NORTH,  
Middletown, Connecticut.

SIR:

I have it in contemplation to make your carbine more effective than any arm now in service by adapting it to receive the new elongated ball and by making four slight grooves which will insure accuracy and effect at 500 yards distance. I think you once offered to make the barrels of steel if desired. I now propose that you have one or two carbines made with cast steel barrels and slightly grooved with four grooves making about one-third revolution in the length of the barrel, or say one turn in six feet. The bore may be of the same calibre as at present; the grooves broad and shallow so that if the lands were taken out the ball would pass smoothly through the barrel. The levers should close the joint of the barrel and receiver tight. If you are willing to take the matter in hand please inform me.

I am, Sir, etc.

Yours,

G. TALCOTT, *Brev. Brig. Gen'l.*  
*Colonel of Ordnance.*

Eighty steel barrel arms were delivered by Colonel North, December 19, 1848. In 1849

## SIMEON NORTH

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and 1850 he delivered 900 steel barrel guns and in 1851, 1852, and 1853, 3,000. On the same date, General Talcott wrote the following letter to Colonel North:—

COLONEL TALCOTT TO COLONEL NORTH

ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON,  
February 5, 1850.

COLONEL SIMEON NORTH,  
Middletown, Connecticut.

SIR:

At the request of the Honorable S. D. Hubbard, I stated to the Secretary of War the expectations which had been held out to you for furnishing parts of the carbine to be used in the repairs of that arm, and that the supply heretofore intended to be called for would not be required in consequence of those arms being now issued to the militia alone, thus passing out of the possession of the United States. The representations of Mr. Hubbard induced the Secretary to agree to receive finished arms equal to what it had been intended to call for, under the heads of repairs, as you have a considerable portion of the work already in progress. You will, therefore, deliver 3,000 carbines in addition to the number heretofore required, and on the same terms.

I am, Sir,

Yours,

G. TALCOTT, *Brev. Brig. Gen'l.*  
*Colonel of Ordnance.*



## HALL RIFLE CONTRACTS

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Colonel North's reply was made at once:

COLONEL NORTH TO COLONEL TALCOTT

MIDDLETOWN, CONT

February the 7th 1850.

GEN<sup>L</sup> GEORGE TALCOTT

Washington D C

HON<sup>D</sup>. SIR—

Yours of the 5th came to hand this day, by which I have the pleasure to receive notice of an addition of Three Thousand Carbines to my contract. Dr Sir, permit me to tender to you my grateful acknowledgments for the favor.

Your proposition to make two Carbines for the purpose of adapting them to receive the new elongated ball I will accept and immediately commence on them, assuring you Sir, that I have the same desire that I always had to do all in my power to improve and perfect the arms of our Country. Will you please inform me where I can obtain some of the balls above mentioned.

I am Sir very truly

Your ob<sup>t</sup> Servant

SIMEON NORTH.

The change suggested by Colonel Talcott was never adopted by the government.

We conclude our citations from the official correspondence with the above letters. This was the last order Colonel North received from the government he had served so well. It is

## SIMEON NORTH

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couched in terms which convey a recognition of the value of the services he had rendered, and of the cordial relations which had remained unbroken through all these years.

The reply was the last letter Colonel North wrote to any government official. It was a characteristic reply. It was written when he was in his eighty-fifth year, and in feeble health; it shows that nevertheless he retained the clearness of mind and the directness of statement which had marked his letter writing through all these years.

At the date of its writing and until his death, the factory was still under his supervision, as its responsible head; but its active management had for some time been turned over to his son James and to Edward Savage, who together succeeded him in the business.

This last order was received shortly after the end of the fiftieth year of his business relations with the government. We may assert with confidence that never before or since has there been a like intimate and continuous association between the United States Government and one of its private citizens; an association involving nearly a million dollars during the whole period covered. Colonel North worked for the govern-



## HALL RIFLE CONTRACTS

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ment under sixteen administrations, representing both political parties; he never received from a single one of the many officials with whom he came in contact, a word of reproof, a criticism of the quality of his work, a suggestion of any failure to do his full duty so far as circumstances permitted. It was a remarkable and in some respects a unique experience.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE HULL AND McDONOUGH PRESENTATION PISTOLS— COLLECTIONS OF NORTH PISTOLS—CONCLUSION

**I**N 1817 the General Assembly of Connecticut passed a resolution authorizing the Governor, Oliver Wolcott, to procure the manufacture of “an elegant sword and a pair of pistols, both mounted with gold and suitable inscriptions, and manufactured in the state,” to be presented to Commodore Isaac Hull, in recognition of his “virtues, gallantry and naval skill.” In accordance with this resolve, Governor Wolcott sent the following letter in duplicate to Eli Whitney, Nathan Starr and Simeon North:

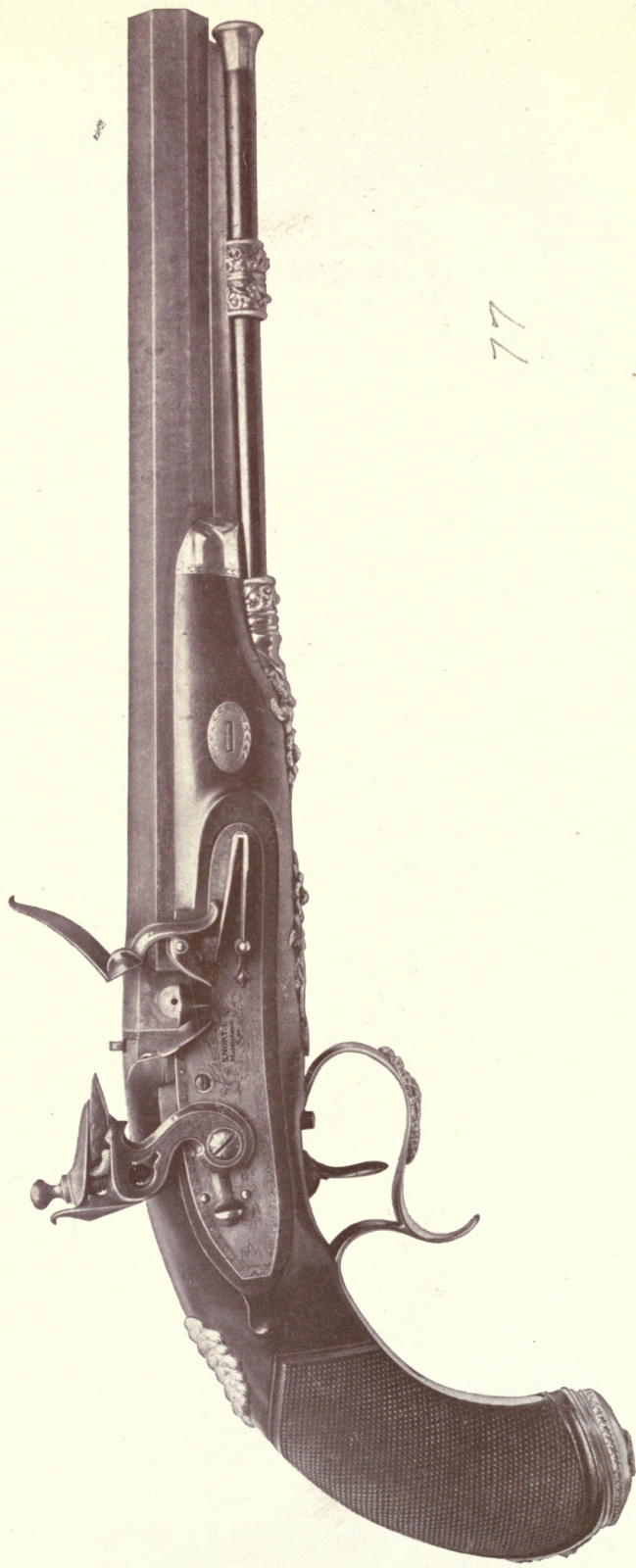
STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
LITCHFIELD, Nov<sup>r</sup> 25th 1817

GENTLEMEN.

The General Assembly of the State of Connecticut, has assigned me the pleasing duty of preparing honorary tokens, expressive of the sense which is entertained by his fellow Citizens, of the virtues, gallantry, and naval Skill of Commodore Isaac Hull. These tokens are to consist of “an elegant Sword, and pair of Pistols, both mounted with gold and suitable inscriptions, and manufactured in this State.”

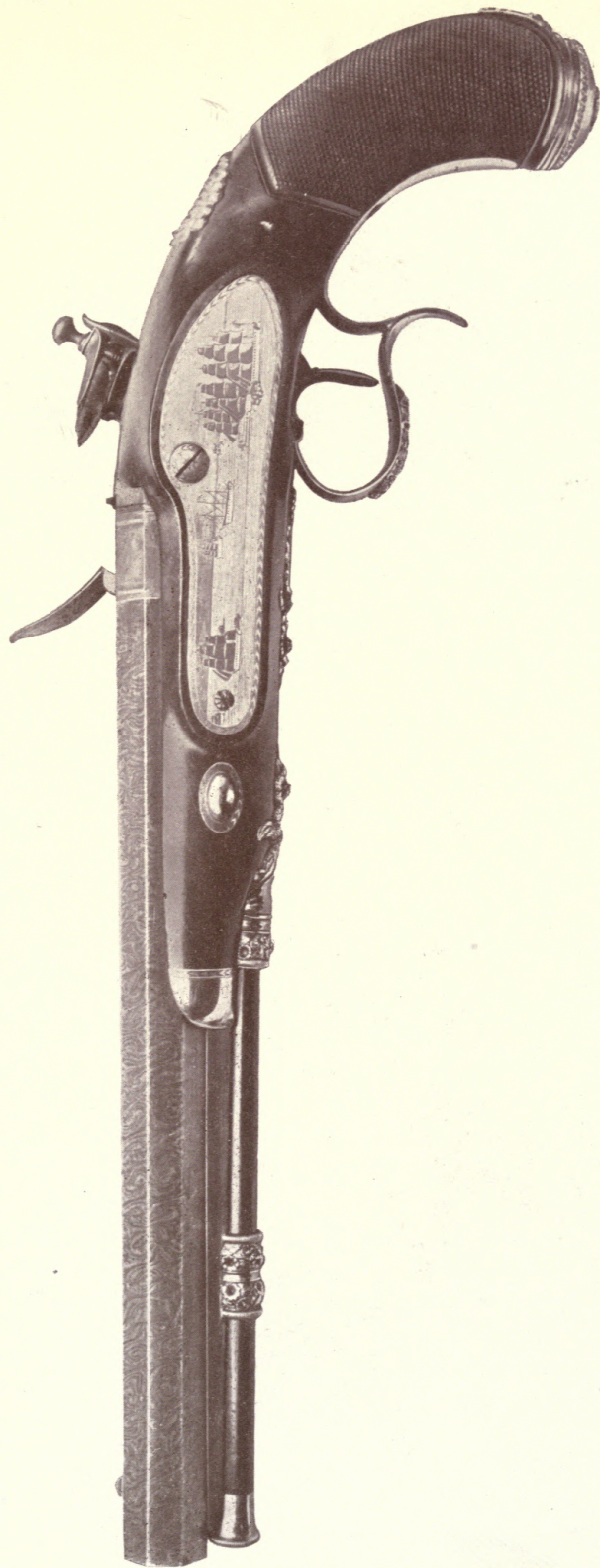






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Gold-mounted Pistols presented to Commodore Isaac Hull in 1820, by the State of Connecticut.





## CONCLUSION

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Being desirous of giving effect to the wishes of the Legislature in the best manner, I am desirous of obtaining the coöperation of the most skillful artists of that description, whom I am authorized to employ; And as You Gentlemen are those with whose performances I am best acquainted, I have concluded to place the whole subject under your direction. I have written to Col<sup>o</sup> John Trumbull at New York, and to M<sup>r</sup> Elkanah Tisdale at Boston, to furnish designs and drawings, with suitable inscriptions; and have been informed that Mess<sup>rs</sup> Dodd & Goodwin, and M<sup>r</sup> Walter Thomas, of Hartford, are probably able to execute the ornamental work, in a Suitable manner. Possibly other persons of equal or superior Skill reside in the State, who are unknown to me.

The Resolve of the Assembly requires that the articles to be presented, shall be manufactured in this State. I am therefore very anxious that they should be so fabricated, as in point of grace, beauty, and utility, not to be inferior and if possible, superior to any similar articles which have been presented in any part of our Country. This object which will be creditable to our Artists, will, I trust, be attained by the coöperation which I now respectfully solicit.

I have the honor to be

Gentlemen, with consideration

Your obed<sup>t</sup> Serv<sup>t</sup>

[SIGNED] OLIV: WOLCOTT.

MESS<sup>rs</sup> ELI WHITNEY, New Haven,  
&  
NATHAN STARR }  
& } Middletown.  
SIMEON NORTH }

## SIMEON NORTH

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Nathan Starr had long been engaged in the manufacture of swords at Middletown. Eli Whitney and Colonel North were the only manufacturers of arms in the state who had attained any prominence. The pistols were made by Colonel North, and the sword by Mr. Starr.

For some reason, probably the delay of those who were commissioned to furnish the designs and drawings, these presentation arms were not completed until May, 1820. The following letter to Nathan Starr, dated August 16, 1819, refers to this delay:

LITCHFIELD, August 16<sup>th</sup> 1819.

NATHAN STARR ESQ<sup>R</sup>

DEAR SIR

I am desired by his Excellency the Governor, again to address you on the subject of the Resolution of the General Assembly, requesting him to cause to be made and presented to Commodore Hull, a Sword and a pair of Pistols.

A period of nearly two years has elapsed since the Resolution was passed, and the Governor is very desirous that its execution should be no longer delayed. And you will much oblige him, by informing him of the progress which has been made in the manufacture of the Articles to be presented, and when it may be expected that they will be finished. He waits for this information before he takes any measures to



## CONCLUSION

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carry into effect a Resolution of the General Assembly, in relation to a pair of Pistols to be made and presented to Commodore M<sup>c</sup>Donough.

I am Sir

very respectfully

Your obed<sup>t</sup> Serv<sup>t</sup>

JABEZ W. HUNTINGTON.

The pistols and sword were completed in May, 1820. The following extract from the proceedings of the Connecticut Legislature shows that each manufacturer received one thousand dollars for his work:

CONNECTICUT LEGISLATURE, May Session, 1820.,

Thursday afternoon, May 25.

Simeon North's bill of one thousand dollars for one pair of Pistols for Capt. Isaac Hull, and Nathan Starr and Son's bill for one thousand dollars for one Sword for Capt. Isaac Hull was read.

Friday morning May 26.

Messrs. North and Starr's bills for sword and pistols were taken up, and the Controller ordered to draw for the amount upon the Treasurer.\*

\*The following item in the *Middlesex Gazette* of June 1, 1820, was reprinted from the *Connecticut Herald* published at Hartford:

ELEGANT SPECIMENS.—We have seen the Sword and Pistols, which agreeable to a resolve of the Legislature of this State, are to be presented to our own gallant countryman, Commodore Isaac Hull, as testimonials of the high respect which the citizens of his native state entertain for his valor and accomplishments as a naval officer. The workmanship of these weapons reflects credit not only on the ingenious artists who made them, but on the country in which they were produced. They are the most elegant specimens of domestic manufacture, that we ever saw. The scabbard and handle of the sword are of pure gold, beautifully wrought

## SIMEON NORTH

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We can imagine the profound satisfaction which Colonel North experienced in the making of this testimonial to his gallant fellow citizen, whose achievement, on August 19, 1812, while in command of the frigate *Constitution*, in the capture of the British frigate *Guerriere*, commanded by Captain Dacres, was the first and among the most brilliant of the naval victories of the Americans in the war of 1812. Many of Commodore Hull's brave sailor boys were armed with naval pistols straight from Colonel North's factory.

These pistols, together with the sword made by Nathan Starr, were deposited in the State Department at Washington, and in 1911 were transferred to the Navy Department, where they may be seen on exhibition in the office of the secretary. They are kept in a glass case, and cared for as priceless relics. Whoever examines them is struck at once by the perfect symmetry and exquisite workmanship of the

with appropriate devices. The most remarkable of these, is a broad leaf of gold, branching from the hilt, as a substitute for an ear. It represents the escape of the *Constitution* from the British squadron, by which she was pursued, on her passage from the Chesapeake to Boston. The blade is a cut and thrust of the modern plan; and is pronounced by those who are judges, to be as well tempered as the best Toledo. The Sword was manufactured by Mr. Nathan Starr, and the Pistols by Mr. North, both of Middletown, in Connecticut. We have not heard when they will be presented.



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weapons. It is the boast of the custodian that nowhere in the world can there be found finer specimens of the armorer's art. The inscriptions on the pistols are as follows:

*On top:* "Voted by General Assembly of the State of Connecticut to their fellow citizen Captain Isaac Hull."

*On the right side:* "S. North, Middletown, Conn."

On the left side, inscribed on a gold plate, let into side of stock, is an engraving of the battle between the *Constitution* and *Guerriere*.

This engraving, as will be seen from its reproduction in the illustration, is a remarkable specimen of the artist's skill.

In the same year Colonel North received a second commission from the governor to make the pair of pistols which the legislature had voted to present to Commodore McDonough, who captured the English squadron of Commodore Downie on Lake Champlain, on September 11, 1814.

This second pair of pistols is almost an exact replica of the pair manufactured for Commodore Hull. They are now in the possession of Mr. George H. McDonough, of Chicago, a grandson of the Commodore. Colonel North subsequently made a number of pairs of pistols, on

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the same model, which were sold for private use.

These commissions from the State testify to the high standing of Colonel North as a skillful manufacturer in his own community. There are evidences that his establishment attracted attention throughout the nation. It appears from the letter of Hon. Samuel W. Dana, June 26, 1817, (page 120) that on the twenty-third of that month James Monroe, recently elected President of the United States, visited the works, which he found "in good order and saw in general operation." Colonel North's letter of June 17, 1817, indicates that the Secretary of War, Hon. John C. Calhoun, of South Carolina, also visited the establishment in the same month.

When General Lafayette came to the United States in 1824, to re-visit the young nation for whose freedom he had fought and in whose welfare he was so profoundly interested, he was taken to the Staddle Hill factory, at Middletown, as one of the sights his hosts were proud to show as an evidence of the rapid industrial development of the country. It was an event in which the whole personnel of the factory participated with a pride equal to that of the master spirit of the establishment. In preparation for it, the



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workmen had brightly polished their machines and as the distinguished visitor entered, they all stood in silence, in clean white aprons, with their backs to their machines. Instantly upon the appearance of Lafayette, the power was started, and the din and clatter of the work began. The factory, very large for its time, and appointed with machinery elsewhere unknown, was one of the favorite points to which visitors to Middletown were taken.

And so Simeon North lived, and worked, and died, honored and famous in his day and generation and forgotten in the next. But not wholly forgotten; for there is one little group of men who still remember him, who appreciate the value of his achievement, and search for and prize the rare specimens of his workmanship which still remain. These are the collectors of pistols and guns which have historic significance.

In the *Outing* magazine for January, 1902, John Paul Bocock published an interesting illustrated article on "Collectors and Collections of Pistols." "The ancient and honorable right to bear arms," he says, "encouraged the collection of rare and valuable weapons from the earliest times. The arms have changed, but collectors are quite as enthusiastic today." He

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gives the names of fifteen or twenty of these collectors, each of whom has his own point of view and from that coign of vantage decides whether he desires to add to his collection the odd pieces he hears of, now and then from queer shops in far-off cities, in auction houses, or perhaps of junk dealers near his very doors, "for the habit of collecting pistols when once formed, can only be extirpated by the surgeon's knife or some anti-germ virus not yet discovered."

In every collection of this character with which Mr. Boccock was familiar, is a more or less complete set of the various models of pistols manufactured by Simeon North for the United States Government. The owner of one of them (Mr. W. A. Hatch of South Columbia, New York) he writes, "was fortunate enough a few years ago, to secure such a unique trophy as a pair of flint-lock dueling pistols made in the United States by the first official American pistol maker, S. North of Berlin, Conn., whose output since that day, in 1813,\* when he got a contract from the United States government for five hundred horse pistols, has been dearly prized by all fanciers of American arms." Else-

\*Mr. Boccock is in error as to the date of this pistol, which was of the 1799 model.



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where Mr. Bocock prints a photograph, with the following explanation: "A group of rare early American horse pistols from the collection of Mr. Bocock, made by the first official American pistol maker, S. North, who made five hundred horse pistols for the government in 1813. They were flint-locks, subsequently, with the other flint-locks in the government armories, altered by Act of Congress to percussion lock. In the same group is the North flint-lock of 1818, and the flint-locks of 1821 and 1828 altered to percussion." Photographic reproductions of all of these several makes of Simeon North pistols appear in this volume, in connection with the account of the contract under which they were made.

It is interesting to note that the flint-lock small arm, which was of Spanish origin and came into use early in the seventeenth century, was the only method of igniting the charge for a period of more than two hundred years, many flint-lock muskets remaining in use in the British army up to as late a period as 1840. The invention of the percussion cap dates from about 1807; but it is an historical fact that it met with no favor with the military authorities of the European governments, or of our own, for many

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years, and not until long after Simeon North had ceased to manufacture pistols. Whatever he may have known or thought about the percussion cap, he was debarred from its use by the well-known hostility of the Ordnance officers to the innovation.

Simeon North's pistols were perfect instruments in their day and generation, and involved what was then regarded as a difficult and complicated mechanism. The world has moved very fast in manufacturing development since his time; so that the pistols he made seem very simple and primitive, in comparison with the weapons that have taken their place. But one fundamental principle of them all,—the interchangeable parts,—remains as he introduced it, and perpetuates his title to an honorable place in the history of that development.

Like the archaeologist who reconstructs an ancient villa from a few scattered stones and ornaments, we have attempted to reproduce Simeon North from the testimony of these official letters and documents. We have been much aided by the traditions concerning his character and his personality which have been persistently and reverently preserved by his descendants. We have not overdrawn the por-



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trait, nor sought to exaggerate either his virtues or his abilities. We have presented him as a type of the men of his day and generation,—one of the many thousands who before his time and after, developed and strengthened American citizenship, and were the real forces which made the State.

It is only when we can thus pull the curtain aside and peer into the inside history of those times, when we analyze the relations of individuals to the social and industrial progress, the moral and physical upbuilding of those small early communities, that we can realize the true significance of their lives. Colonel North, like father and grandfather before him, shunned notoriety and sought no part in the turmoil and struggle of men for place and prominence. He possessed certain characteristics which deterred men from seeking him out and pushing him forward. There was a degree of absolute independence about his way of looking at all things, a self-poise and a masterfulness, which made him a man not inclined to travel in harness with other men, but which would have made him a power in all public councils had he had the taste for shaping public affairs. He preferred the narrower field of personal and private influence;

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and within this field he found ample play for his activities and sympathies. He built up around him one of those homes which, indefinitely multiplied among the people, are the safe foundations of our democratic institutions and the guarantees of the future of our republic. Father of a fine family of sons and daughters,—worthy scions of six generations of New England settlers,—it yet furnished an example of the tendency among such families to scatter, under the rapid shifting of business conditions, and the temptation to build new homes in far-off places. The great manufacturing business he built up so laboriously and skillfully, disappeared with his death. He started in life with meager capital, marked out an untrodden field of industry, pushed his way resolutely forward amid great difficulties, built a modern factory, and equipped it with novel machinery of his own invention. His application of the principle of interchangeable parts in the manufacture of small arms was one of the most important achievements in the development of our mechanical superiority; and, until this day, he has never received the slightest credit for it. He established an altruistic relationship between employer and employe, which lies at the root of a new, and some people



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think, a Utopian solution of the most troublesome problem with which the present generation has to deal. He was the soul of honor; and at the summit of his career, he sacrificed a well-earned fortune to make good the losses of faithless friends for whom he had endorsed under false representations. In a business relationship with the government covering half a century, he never asked nor received an improper favor, nor sought any advantage not open to every competitor. He was quiet of speech and restrained in language, under the most trying circumstances. His biographers, having ransacked the archives of the government for every official document or memorandum which bears in any way upon his thoughts, plans and doings, are unable to find a single word which they would change or obliterate. The correspondence we have reproduced in this Memoir embodies his life work, and furnishes the key to his character. It shows that he had a way of doing fine, large things, and saying nothing about it.

Long dead, Simeon North yet lives; and his voice, reproduced out of the past with the faithful ring of the phonograph, carries a clarion note to the American business man of today.







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